THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S®

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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11 HAIR-RAZING TALES

GEORGE C. CHESBRO

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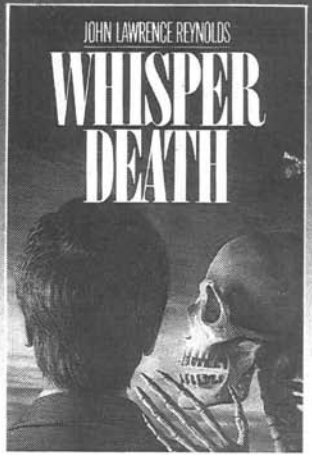

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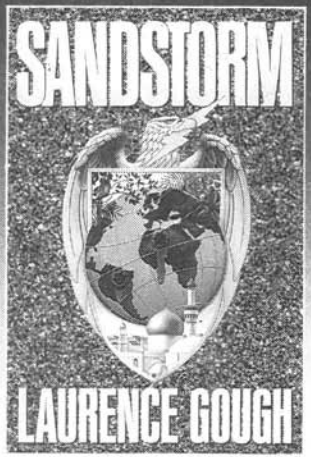

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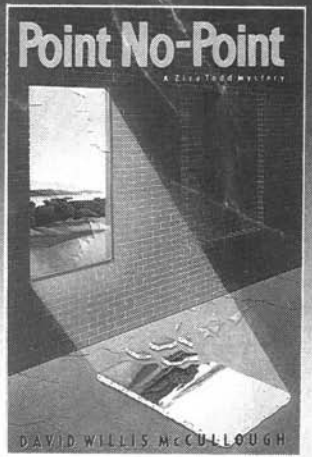

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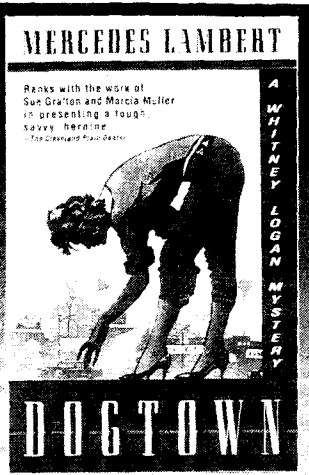
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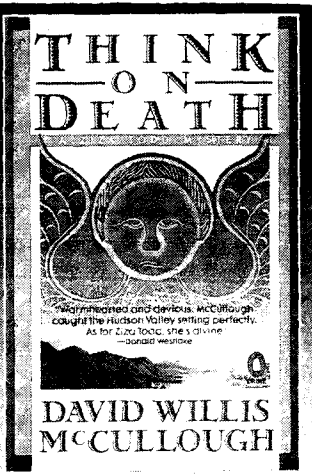
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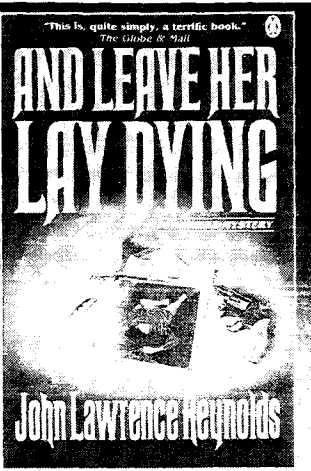

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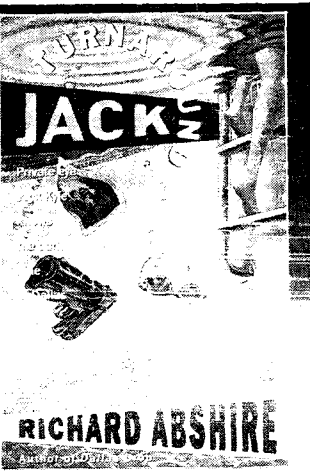

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a *NEW* Garth story by

GEORGE C. CHESBRO

So much of her husband remained hidden from her, Mary thought; there were secrets in his past shared, if at all, only with his brother, and so she was impressed but hardly surprised to find that, before their marriage, Garth had frequently spent summers in the Alaskan bush prospecting for gold in a particularly dangerous area known as the "forty-acre tract" . . .

THE WHITE BEAR

by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

Grizzlies and brown bears were really the same creature, she learned from the man who had appeared unannounced at their front door, and both smelled like the rotting meat that was their preferred diet.

Half of Jacob Andover's face was a wasteland of scar tissue, and his surviving eye seemed too bright, as if there were fever smoldering in him. He appeared emaciated, but somehow still projected an aura of strength; he was a feral creature of gristle and bone, with permanently tanned skin and a Seattle Seahawks cap pulled tightly onto his head. Although she had met him for the first time less than an hour before, Mary Tree already considered him perhaps the second most remarkable man she had ever known, the first being Garth Frederickson, her husband, who sat next to her on the beige couch in the music room of their home overlooking the Hudson River, listening as Jacob Andover talked, telling tales of ice and cold and bears, moose, caribou, wolves, and wolverines, of pink living rivers of salmon, and the beluga and killer whales that came to feed on them.

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So much of her husband remained hidden from her, Mary thought; there were secrets in his past shared, if at all, only with his brother, and so she was impressed but hardly surprised to find that, before their marriage, Garth had frequently spent summers in the Alaskan bush prospecting for gold in a particularly dangerous area known as the "forty-acre tract," near a town named Chicken. Nor was she surprised to learn from Andover that one summer Garth had camped on a sandbar which he shared with a grizzly sow and her two cubs; her husband certainly had a most unusual effect on people, including strange men like Jacob Andover, and so it seemed only natural to her that the grizzly sow wouldn't have been bothered by his presence. Finally, she wasn't surprised that Andover, when he knew he was dying, had traveled six thousand miles to seek out Garth.

"It's just the damndest thing," the scar-faced man with the bright green eye said, with an air of almost childlike wonder in the face of something awesome he was still unable to fully comprehend. He grinned, revealing a set of even, white teeth that were apparently his own and which seemed at odds with the rest of his appearance. "I hadn't seen no color for months. I was running low on funds and getting real tired of the bush, and I figured I needed a change of scenery. I used a contact I got and went up on the north slope to work the pipeline and make me some money. Big mistake. Garth, you know how I feel about keeping a clean camp, because if you leave stuff lying around, sooner or later some bear's gonna pay you a visit when you ain't expectin' it. You get in the habit of tidying up. I was at the airport in Anchorage waiting to catch one of the commuter flights to the slope. I go into the men's room to take care of my business, and I notice one of the trash cans is full to overflowing with paper towels. I go to push it down and stick myself in the hand with this hypodermic needle somebody tossed in there. Didn't think nothing of it at the time. If I'd known then that that little needle prick was going to be the end of old Jacob, I guess I wouldn't have been in such a hurry to catch my plane. Hell, I probably wouldn't have believed it would kill me anyway. It took this last bout with that funny kind of pneumonia and a collapsed lung to convince me I'd better start taking care of my last bits of business."

Garth sat very still, watching the other man, but Mary sat bolt upright on the sofa.

"Oh, God, Jacob," Mary said, shaking her head. "I'm so sorry."

"It's all right, ma'am," Andover replied. His lips again drew back from his teeth, this time forming more a grimace than a grin. "To

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tell you the truth," he continued more softly, "I don't much like people feeling sorry for me. It makes me real uncomfortable, so I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't do any crying on my behalf."

"Jacob, Garth and I do volunteer work for a self-help group of people with exactly the same kind of illness. Why don't you . . . ?" She allowed her voice to trail off when Jacob Andover raised his hand and slowly but firmly shook his head.

"Thank you, Mary, but Garth will tell you that I was never much for joining groups. Your husband's about the only man I've met in twenty years I could stand to be with more than an hour when I wasn't drunk."

"He's come to terms with it, Mary," Garth said in a low voice, without taking his eyes off the other man's face. "Jacob's come to say goodbye."

Jacob Andover stared back at Garth for a few moments, then said, "Yeah, that too."

"What else, Jacob?"

The gaunt prospector, trapper, and hunter reached down to the stained, torn canvas duffel bag on the floor between his feet and opened it. He took out three bulging drawstring pouches made from moosehide and a magnificent knife of blue-grey steel with a handle carved from walrus tusk. He set the items aside on the floor, zipped up the bag, and chuckled. This triggered a coughing attack. He quickly took a handkerchief out of his pocket, covering his mouth as he looked away in embarrassment. Finally the spasm passed. He wiped his mouth, looked back at Garth, and smiled wryly.

"Since you are the only person I was able to spend more than an hour with when I wasn't drunk, and since you're the only human in twenty years who made me feel good to be human, I figured that makes you my sole heir. For me, the biggest kick in prospecting was always in finding the color, and I never did get around to spending much of it, what with living in the bush and all that. Even when I did need money, I preferred to keep the dust and nuggets around to remind me of why the hell I was working so hard. This is part of my last will and testament. I want you to have the gold and the knife, which I always knew you had a keen eye for. I'd have brought you my rifle, Magnum, and shotgun, but I figured they wouldn't let me carry them on the plane, so I gave them to the bartender and two of the waitresses at the saloon in Chicken."

"Thank you, Jacob," Garth said quietly. "I appreciate that. I'll take the knife, which I have always had a keen eye for, but you'll

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need the gold for medical expenses. You know you're going to die soon, and you've accepted that, but there's no reason for you not to make the most of the days, weeks, or months you have left. There are drugs and other treatments that can help you."

"And you're welcome to stay with us, Jacob," Mary said, moving closer to Garth and taking his hand. "You have a refuge in which to die with dignity, if you care to accept it."

Jacob Andover was silent for some time, glancing back and forth between the man with whom he had spent so little time but to whom he felt so close, and the beautiful folk singer with waist-length blond hair and blue eyes who was the man's wife. Finally his eye misted, a single tear formed and rolled down his sunken cheek. "I thank you for making me that offer, Mary," he said in a low voice, "but I won't be needing to take you up on it. Now that I've decided what my last will and testament is going to be, I'm anxious to get on with the rest of my business before I check out. Garth, the gold stays here, but I have to ask you to wait a few days for the knife. I'll make sure it gets to you."

Garth took his hand from Mary's, then leaned forward on the sofa, resting his elbows on his knees and staring hard at the man sitting in the wicker chair across the room. "What is it, Jacob?" he asked. "Why else are you here?"

The other man was again silent for a time, as if considering the question. Then he said, "You remember, Garth, how you and I used to talk about the differences between living in Alaska and back East here?"

Garth brushed his hand back through his thinning, shoulder-length, wheat-colored hair, and fixed the other man with his brown eyes. "I seem to recall we mostly talked about the different sources of danger, the things that can get a person killed."

"That's right. In Alaska, it's the environment that's most likely to kill you if you're not careful. In winter, when it's forty below, you can run your car off the road, or wander off a trail, and freeze to death in no time at all. In the East, you couldn't really get lost if you were trying to; there's almost always a house, more likely a whole neighborhood, or a road with traffic, just over the next hill. In Alaska you can get your head torn off by a bear a mile or so into the bush, or get stomped to death by a moose in your driveway. The danger there comes mostly from the environment, but you can take steps to protect yourself—carry a survival pack in your car, make a lot of noise when you hike in the bush, and look out the window to

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see what may be standing on your front lawn before you go outside. Here, it's the damn people crowding all around you who are dangerous, and you never know when somebody's sneaking up behind you to mug, rape, maim, or kill. To me, this is a far more dangerous place to live than the forty-acre tract."

"I couldn't agree more," Mary said evenly, glancing at Garth.

"Well, I've certainly killed more than my share of animals, but I always did it in self-defense, or for food or hides, or something else I needed. I could never see no sense in gunning down some moose or bison, because they're so stone dumb they'll just stand there and look at you while you do it. I was never much interested in killing for the sake of killing, if you know what I mean."

"The people who do that sort of thing call themselves sportsmen," Mary said drily.

"I did me enough hunting in the war to last me a lifetime, and I never did know if the men I killed there deserved to die. But it occurred to me while I was over there that if I ever did really want to hunt something—say, for sport, or any other reason—it would be a man, and it wouldn't bother my conscience none because the man I hunted would be some son-of-a-bitch who deserved to die."

"Jacob," Garth said quietly, "do you really think I'd want that knife after you've used it to kill a man?"

"Well, I guess I'd say that depends on who it was I killed."

"No. You'd be wrong."

Jacob Andover's eye narrowed. "The way I hear it, you and that real smart little brother of yours have killed a whole lot of men."

"Men who were trying to kill us, Jacob. Like the bears you've shot. Who do you want to kill?"

"T. L. Michael Mason," the other man replied evenly, and smiled thinly. "He enough of a son-of-a-bitch for you?"

Garth exchanged glances with Mary, then leaned back on the sofa and crossed his arms over his chest. "You know."

"Yeah, I know. You're after the thieving, murdering bastard yourself. Janie Aglook told me how you and your brother are working for one of the tribal corporations, trying to prove not only that it was him and his men who sacked that village, but that he's been pulling stunts like that for a long time. I'll bet half of that collection of artifacts he's got were stolen, but you won't get many Eskimos, Indians, or Aleuts coming to New York City to complain about him."

"How do you know Dr. Aglook?"

"I never told you that story?"

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Garth shook his head. "You were never much of a talker, Jacob. You seemed pleased to seek out my company and just sit for a time, or listen to me talk, so that's how it went."

"You got that right," Andover said with a curt nod. " 'Nam messed up my mind pretty good. After I left there, I couldn't stand to be around people. A lot of us were like that, and a lot of us went looking for wild places where we could be by ourselves and just sort of do what we pleased so we wouldn't hurt so damn much. I headed for Alaska."

"So did a lot of other Vietnam vets," Garth said quietly.

"Yeah, but I went a lot *farther* into Alaska than the others. I wasn't content to just camp out in the bush. I had nightmares bad, and keeping on the move helped some. I just kept heading north. Who knows? Maybe I was looking to get killed, and I almost did. After three or four years of wandering, living off the land, I made it all the way up to the circle. A polar bear caught me out on the ice, scalped me like they do, bit through my rib cage, and damn near tore off my left arm. He must have figured I was dead, 'cause he dragged me off to an ice cave and left me to ripen up for a few days. I was found by some Inuit—Janie's people. They put me on a sled, took me back to their village, and healed me up. I'm probably the only white man you'll ever meet who actually likes Eskimo ice cream. Anyway, you can imagine my surprise when I wake up one morning, half out of my mind with fever, to find this pretty young Eskimo woman sitting beside my bed, holding my hand, and talking to me in perfect English. With a Boston accent, no less. Sounded like a Kennedy.

"Later, I found out that she'd been adopted by some hotshot Eskimos on the tribal corporation board, and they'd made sure she got some hotshot schooling. When I met her, she'd just gotten her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology. She'd spent years studying Eskimos in general, and this particular group of Inuit. She wrote papers about them. Finest woman I've ever met. If it hadn't been for her visits two or three times a year, I'd probably have forgotten my English."

Mary asked, "You came back by yourself when you were better?"

"Heck yes, ma'am. I didn't need Janie to show me how to get back. And I didn't mind living with the Eskimos; I liked their lifestyle. Life up on the circle was real simple. I'd go off hunting by myself a lot, but I always brought back meat and hides to share with the tribe, so they accepted me. They even gave me an Eskimo name, called me the White Bear.

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"After a few years up there on the circle, I started feeling a little better, so I headed back south. Worked on the slope for a while, and then I went into the bush to prospect for gold. But while I was living with the Eskimos I learned to do a little scrimshaw, carved ivory and bone—not too good, mind you, but I enjoyed doing it. I carved a polar bear once, gave it to the couple who'd cared for me when I was mangled up. It was such a bad carving that most of those Inuit would have laughed if they weren't so polite, but the couple appreciated my effort, and said they'd keep it always as a treasured gift. Eskimos don't fool about things like that. Now, your T. L. Michael Mason claims he got all his Eskimo artifacts and carvings through legitimate trading outlets. He also claims he and his hunting buddies were never in that village that was sacked. He's a damn liar on both counts, because that bear I carved is right now sitting in one of the glass display cases in the lobby of that big building he owns on Fifth Avenue."

Garth uncrossed his arms, sat bolt upright on the sofa. "Can you prove that, Jacob?"

Andover shrugged. "Well, anybody who knows about such things would know that bear wasn't carved by any Eskimo artist—Mason ain't the expert he claims to be. It also happens to have my initials carved into the bottom. You tell me if that proves he and his men sacked the village, raped a couple of women, stole their carvings and raw ivory, and killed a man."

"It could be an important contribution to the prosecution's case. Look, if you'll give me a deposition—"

"I already started all that deposition stuff with some lawyers in New York Janie sent me to. I'm supposed to talk to them again next week. It was Janie who contacted me and brought me here, and it was Janie who told me where to find you here in Cairn. Nice town. That's some river out there."

"If you're working with lawyers for the tribal corporation, Jacob, then you're doing all you can. I'm investigating other leads concerning stolen artifacts that, together with your bear, could at least prove that Mason is a thief and a liar. Let it go."

"I gave them the deposition, and they say they want to talk to me a few more times after they talk to other people. They want me to testify at his trial, if there is one, but there ain't a chance I'll live that long. Each morning now when I wake up it's a surprise to me. Most days it's a big disappointment. You want to know what's going to happen to Mason? Nothing. That's what. I ain't been out of touch

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for so long as to forget how lawyers do their business, and Mason's got plenty of those. They'll say there's no way to prove the couple I gave the bear to didn't give it away to some other Eskimo who sold it."

"Dr. Aglook has Eskimos who'll testify that the two planes that landed near their village bore the logo of Mason's corporation, and they'll identify him as one of the raiders."

Andover made a dismissive gesture with his trembling right hand. "Ten minutes after a lawyer gets one of those witnesses on the stand, he won't know the difference between a logo and a logjam. The lawyer will say all white men look the same to an Eskimo. The Eskimos will end up looking foolish. That's the way it's going to go. The way I figure it, part of my last will and testament is to give my death to serve some good purpose. I don't give a damn about all those bodyguards Mason has, because I don't mind getting killed. It's what I want. My life's been pretty worthless, when all's said and done, but I'd like my death to mean something. All I need to do is get close enough to Mason to cut his throat, and then justice will have been done."

"It's not going to work out, Jacob," Garth said softly.

The other man raised his head slightly and frowned. The too-bright light in his one eye seemed colder. "No? Why not?"

"Because I can't let you do it."

"And just how do you think you can stop me?"

"You have to understand that this isn't the bush," Garth replied in the same soft tone. "Here, neither of us can just go about taking care of our business any way we please."

"I can."

"No. I'm a private investigator licensed by the state of New York. I'm currently involved in a case that's before the courts, and that limits my actions in certain ways. Information you give me isn't privileged. I can't learn of a plan to murder the man I'm investigating, and not notify the authorities. I could be brought up on criminal charges myself. In short, Jacob, I'll stop you by calling in the cops."

The other man's half-face grew even paler. "You'd call the cops on me?"

"I've said it."

"You think I'm wrong, Frederickson?"

"It doesn't matter what I think, Jacob, only what I do. I don't care to discuss it any longer. I need to hear from you that you don't intend to pursue Mason outside of the legal process."

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Jacob Andover abruptly rose to his feet and picked up his duffel bag, leaving the three pouches filled with gold dust on the floor. He walked stiffly to the door of the music room, hesitated, then turned back. "I thought much better of you before I came here, Frederickson," he said in a rasping voice. "I won't be seeing or talking to you again." Then he walked quickly out of the room.

Mary, her face mirroring her distress, started to rise to go after him but stopped when she felt the pressure of her husband's hand on her thigh. She looked inquiringly at Garth, who raised his hand slightly to indicate she should wait. Although puzzled, Mary had learned from experience that Garth had certain very special sensibilities about certain things, and she nodded her assent.

A few seconds later they heard the screen door at the front of the house open and close, indicating that their visitor had left. Garth continued to wait almost two minutes before he finally rose and indicated to Mary that she should follow him. They walked through the house and out the front door. Mary glanced past Garth down the walk and saw the hunched shape of Jacob Andover sitting on the steps leading down to the sidewalk and street. His frail shoulders were shaking as if he were crying. She turned toward Garth to ask how he had known the other man would not be going far, but her husband was already walking toward the slumped figure. He knelt down, put his powerful arms around the weeping man, held the scarred head to his chest. Mary knelt down on the other side of Andover and gently stroked his back.

"I'm so ashamed," he sobbed into Garth's shoulder. "I'm so damn tired all the time. Sometimes it's all I can do to get out of bed. I was just hoping I'd have enough energy left to pay back Mason for what he did to the people who saved my life. God, Garth, I was even hoping you might help me. I don't think I can manage it by myself. Right now I don't have enough energy to get down to the street."

"You'll stay with us, Jacob," Garth said, lifting the frail man in his arms and starting back up the walk to the house. "We'll talk about what can be done about Mr. Mason."

They never did get around to talking about what could be done about T. L. Michael Mason. Garth and Mary cared for Jacob Andover, gave him a place to live, food, and comfort. On days when Jacob was feeling stronger, he would take the Red-and-Tan bus into New York City to confer with the tribal corporation lawyers, or take walks, or run errands. Two weeks after his arrival in Cairn, the newspapers carried reports of his death at the hands of a gang of

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teenagers who'd tried to rob him as he was walking in Central Park. Jacob had killed two of his attackers, and severed the spinal cord of a third.

Mary was troubled when she found her husband smiling as he read the accounts of the attack and deaths. "Garth," she said in a curt tone she had never before used with him, "do you think what happened to Jacob and those kids is *funny?*"

"No," Garth replied evenly. "It's not exactly what I would describe as funny, but it does make me feel good."

Mary shook her head. "Garth, I can't believe it's you saying that. I don't understand at all."

His smile vanished so suddenly that Mary, despite her knowledge that Garth was not angry, felt a slight chill. "Listen to me, Mary," Garth said in a soft, even tone. "We share love, but we haven't really known each other for very long, so you're still getting to know me. For you to understand why I feel good about what's happened, you must first understand why I don't feel bad. Jacob Andover was a very strange and dangerous man, but he never hurt anyone who wasn't trying to hurt him. He had a strong, if primitive, sense of justice, and his presence in the world did not cause a blight. He was dying, slowly and painfully, in a way that was totally humiliating to him. He wanted to make his death count for something, and now it has. Those 'kids,' as you called them, have arrest records dating back years, juveniles charged as adults. They were rapists, robbers, killers. They were on a rampage in the park that day, beating up and robbing, or sexually molesting, anyone who got in their way. From all the evidence cited in the news reports, the lives of the two youths Jacob killed in self defense, and the one he maimed, were irredeemable; they would have spent the rest of their lives hurting and killing people until they were put away in prison for good, or until somebody stopped them another way. Jacob stopped them. They went after Jacob because they thought he was helpless, not realizing he was a wounded bear every bit as dangerous as they were, or more so. They got what they deserved, and when Jacob died at their hands he took the evil and blight of their lives out of the world with him. It's what Jacob, who was a decent man, wanted. That's why I like the way things worked out. Now, if you feel sad or upset, and you appear to, I'd like you to explain that to me."

Mary stared at her husband for some time before turning and walking slowly out of the room. A half minute later she reappeared in the doorway.

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"Garth?"

"Yes?"

"Do you still own the claim where you and Jacob spent the summer with the grizzly sow and her cubs?"

"Yes. I never mentioned it because Alaska's a very long way away, the area around Chicken is rough, and it's not the sort of thing I thought you'd have the slightest interest in."

"Would you take me there some time? Show me how to live in the bush and pan for gold? I'd like to learn."

Garth smiled warmly. "Sure," he said, and took his wife in his arms.

ON OUR COVER

Best known as the creator of Mongo (a.k.a. Dr. Robert Frederickson, ex-circus performer and dwarf, turned professor of criminology) George Chesbro is one of the most versatile writers in the genre. His twenty books range from adventure/suspense to espionage to detective fiction. Even when he is writing a classic mystery novel, Mr. Chesbro borrows freely from other genres, seemingly employing elements of fantasy and science fiction—although when questioned on this point he claims that a supernatural reading of the events he describes in such novels as *An Affair of Sorcerers* is entirely in the mind of the reader. On any reading, however, this author has an unusual and off-beat imagination that makes his work unforgettable.

Chesbro's character Garth Frederickson, brother of the appealing Mongo, first appeared in the Mongo books, but Mr. Chesbro felt he needed to give him a starring role in order to develop his character fully; the result is the two stories published in this and the December 1991 issue of *EQMM*.

Mr. Chesbro lives in Nyack, New York, where he writes full-time. From 1962 to 1979 he taught special education in New York State schools, dealing primarily with mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed children. A writer since his college days, he is currently executive vice president of the Mystery Writers of America. His most recent book is *Dark Chant in a Crimson Key*, available from Mysterious Press.

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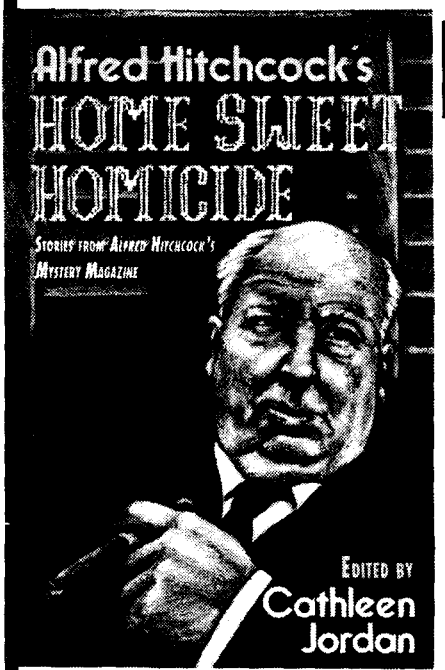
AT HOME WITH Hitchcock



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Kavanagh understood. He understood the implications of an archaeological excavation for the Slieve Crum Power Scheme. When the archaeologists had had their say, there would be nowhere on all that barren mountain moor where a power station could be built without first being picked over by old men with trowels. When Mrs. Pat showed her guest to his room, Kavanagh called a council of war . . .

A POISONED CHALICE

by JO BANNISTER

Mountains gathered about the road where the Land Rover died. Their craggy heads inclined forward, like witnesses at an accident. Then, as if moved by what they saw, they began to cry.

David Grace, hunched over the wheel, watched them through the rain-lashed windscreen and reflected that motor-mechanics ought to be a fundamental element in the study of archaeology. He could distinguish between Beaker and Bronze Age potsherds at ten paces, but he had no idea what was wrong with his Land Rover and could not have fixed it if someone had told him. When it began its death-rattle five miles back he knew only two things: that the vehicle would never reach civilisation, and that when he finally had to get out and walk it would be raining.

He studied the map. Small-scale maps were more use to him professionally, but in this part of Ireland a small-scale map would have had nothing on it. This was a compromise: when he unfolded it on his knee it showed three villages and two roads.

Ballynaslieve was the closest, eight miles away if he stuck to the road. If he left the road and cut between the mountains, he could halve that. It was a choice between two unattractive alternatives, but he opted for the sheep-trod through the heather. He pulled on boots and waterproofs and committed himself to the fell.

In Ballynaslieve they were celebrating. In the saloon bar of Kavanagh's, Pat Kavanagh had tapped a fresh keg in honour of the occa-

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sion and the assembly were helping themselves freely. There was also a cake, which Mrs. Pat had made and iced artistically with the legend "Slieve Crum Power Scheme."

For Ballynaslieve was about to join the twentieth century. A power scheme would bring work. The sons of shepherds need not now be shepherds: some could be builders, some could be engineers. The people who came here to run the scheme would need houses, and groceries, and drink, and some of them might need wives. There would be a bus service. The price of land, that for generations had been less than the value of the sheep it fed, would soar.

Ballynaslieve was about to become an abode of rich men.

A mile away down the long valley, the sheep-trod crested the gap between Slieve Crum and Slieve Diuran. A fast-scurrying little stream tumbled through the narrow place as a waterfall. Archaeologists keep fitter than most scientists, and Dr. Grace was still a young man, but he was panting by the time the path levelled out. The way up had been steeper than it looked from the road, but now all that lay between him and Ballynaslieve was a small lough lying in the cup of the hills.

The day was ending. But before the last of the light went, a maverick ray pierced the leaden sky and lit a cluster of stones close by the lough-shore. Grace broke his stride and stared down at them. Then he left the trod and began to walk towards them. After a moment he began to run.

In Kavanagh's the cake had been cut and the glasses recharged for a toast to the Slieve Crum Power Scheme when the door banged open and in with the night and the rain came something upholstered in mud and PVC. It padded, squelching, to the bar and ordered a hot whiskey. It pushed back the hood of its cagoule and fixed the landlord with a glittering eye, and inquired if he was aware that he was serving alcoholic beverages within a mile of a Neolithic passage grave unknown to archaeology.

"Passage grave? Passage grave?" The words ran through the assembly without striking any chord of familiarity. No one in Ballynaslieve had heard of Knowth or Dowth, and Willie John Savage thought Newgrange was a Gaelic football team.

Dr. Grace asked for the telephone. Kavanagh, who was astute in many ways, was apologetic. "The line's down again." He went out-

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side for another keg, and when Grace tried the instrument behind the bar he met only silence.

When Kavanagh returned he respectfully sought a fuller explanation and Grace, now into his third whiskey, was happy to oblige.

He was on his way to address a conference in Dublin, took a short-cut through the mountains, and broke down. Walking across the moor he chanced upon the bones of a Neolithic passage grave of the seminal, though geographically remote, Boyne Valley group. The significance of the find among these barren hills could hardly be overstated. Once he got through to Dublin, his colleagues would descend on Ballynaslieve with every device known to archaeology. They would pick their way through the site inch by inch and map its history minutely, should it take them years to do it.

Kavanagh understood. He understood the implications of any such excavation for the Slieve Crum Power Scheme. When the archaeologists had had their say there would be nowhere on all that barren mountain moor where a power station could be built without first being picked over by old men with trowels. When Mrs. Pat showed her guest to his room, Kavanagh called a council of war.

In the morning the phone was still not working, but at least the rain had stopped. Grace said he was going to examine the grave in daylight. Kavanagh offered to accompany him.

There was much activity on the sheep-trod: a tractor, a team of chestnut horses, any number of bulky young men mopping sweat from their brows as they ambled back towards Ballynaslieve. Grace was surprised at such industry so early in the day, but his mind was too full of his discovery to give it much thought.

When they got there, there was no sign of the grave. Kavanagh, watching covertly, saw shock and horror and disbelief chase through Grace's face. The monument was gone. Where it had stood, its tall stones buried to their shoulders in the rubble of the collapsed cairn, now there was only mud rutted with the tracks of tires, horses, and men. Nearby stood a brand new dry-stone wall.

Kavanagh laid a paternal arm around the younger man's shoulders. "What—was that it? Man dear, that was only Willie John Savage's mammy's old house. Fifty years ago it fell down and he's been meaning to shift it ever since."

"It was a passage grave," whispered Grace, stricken. "It was four thousand years old."

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"No, no," said the big man kindly, steering him back towards the village. "Old Mrs. Savage's wee house. It's been an eyesore all my life."

Later and alone, Grace returned to the lough-shore to grieve. There was nothing left. He examined the new wall stone by stone, looking for the carvings typical of the Boyne group, but there were none. They were only stones, timeless and impervious to inquiry.

Turning his back on the disaster, he wandered numbly up the hill. Already he was losing his grip on the reality of what he had seen. Perhaps his grave had been no more than a tumbled farmhouse and a trick of the light.

The sunlight fell obliquely into the valley and, as he looked down on them, suddenly the humps and ridges he had trudged across last night began to take on a pattern. He blinked. Tiredness and disappointment were deceiving him. But the pattern was still there, straight lines and circles that had no place in nature, and slowly he recognised what it was he was seeing.

Back at Kavanagh's, he pinned Pat to the wall with one strong finger. "I'm telling you this so there'll be no repetition of this morning's performance. Close by that passage grave—sorry, Ma Savage's old house—are a series of Bronze Age earthworks. There are the shapes of huts there, and hearths, and post-holes, and maybe a cist-cairn. When we excavate we'll find pottery and metal and cooking-sites and burials. Stay away from it."

As luck would have it, the mechanic from Tamnahogue called by. He drove Dr. Grace round the mountain to his Land Rover, but he could not start it so they towed it into Ballynaslieve. The mechanic promised to return with parts.

Grace set out once more to walk to the little lough. Once more Kavanagh fell into step beside him. "Tell me again what this thing looks like."

"Like nothing. Like a few bumps and ruts in the ground. Never mind what it looks like, it's two thousand years old and when we excavate we'll find a center of political power comparable with the Hill of Tara. Some great chieftain must have ruled from here, and what he left behind will extend immeasurably what we know about the period."

Before they rounded the shoulder of Slieve Crum, a deep throaty roar of machinery reached them, and Grace's eyes widened in dread. He kicked into a run down the track. Kavanagh followed at his own

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pace, and just round the shoulder found Grace rooted to the spot. On the shore of the lough a giant tractor was ploughing the peat.

"You did this," said Grace, his eyes hating. "Why?"

"The forestry? It's nothing to do with me."

"I found a passage grave and you cleared it. I found earthworks and you ploughed them. Why?"

Kavanagh looked down the hillside. "Is that where your earthworks were? Sure, that was nothing more than drainage ditches Peter Savage dug. They never worked, the valley's too wet for a few ruts to make a difference. But the trees should do well enough."

"You are destroying your own heritage," said Grace in his teeth. "Why?"

"Heritage? An old cottage and some field drains?"

Grace said again, "Why?"

Kavanagh considered for a moment. He was not an unkind man. He sat down heavily beside the archaeologist. He said, "It's a good job it was only the light playing tricks on you, for if there was anything here that warranted a proper investigation it would be a terrible tragedy for Ballynaslieve.

"I've lived here all my life. It was a one-horse town until the horse died. There were no evictions here during the famine—the landlord didn't want it back. Cromwell marched through and never noticed it, and while Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne spent a night here he could find nothing worth fighting over.

"Now, finally, somebody's found a use for Ballynaslieve. They're going to build a power station in the valley here. After all this time the place has a future. But if you'd been right, they'd have had to hold off building until you finished your digging. Long before that, our power station would be up and running in somebody else's valley. We need that scheme. We need a future more than we need a past."

David Grace was still there two hours later when the great tractor finished ploughing and trundled away. The valley floor was like corduroy. Nothing of its ancient contours survived. He walked down to the lough-shore but could no longer be sure where the earthworks had been.

A shape in the furrow caught his eye. It was dull and grey, and might have been a stone turned up by the plough except that its lines were sharp and regular. Before his fingers touched it he knew what it was. He picked it carefully out of the earth and rinsed it in

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the waters of the lough, and the bowl took on a gunmetal glow.

It was a silver chalice, turned up by a forestry plough a thousand years after a monk fleeing from Vikings had dropped it. The peat had held it safe through ten centuries while armies and sheep had marched overhead. Even the plough had not damaged it.

This little valley was an archaeological time capsule. Monuments and artifacts leapt out of the ground to ambush the passer-by. Whatever Kavanagh had destroyed, more must remain safe and unsuspected under the protecting peat.

"This site has got to be dug," Grace swore to himself. A radiance like religion was in his eyes and, up to his knees in the lough, he held up the chalice in an almost Arthurian pledge.

The men watching from the mountainside saw nothing heroic about him. He looked to them like a bird of evil omen, and from the reverent way he clutched his new discovery he was not finished yet.

Grace looked up and saw the watchers on the skyline. Fear—for himself but more for his treasure—stabbed at him. He waded ashore. The men above him had not moved, but they must have seen what he carried. It was too late to hide it. So he ran. Weighed down by water and mud, the ploughed peat sucking at his steps, the chalice under his arm an awkward burden, he headed down the valley towards the gap between the mountains and the road three miles beyond.

He was never going to make it. It was too far, the going was too rough, and he was an archaeologist, not a fell-runner. The advantage of the high ground enabled the men of Ballynaslieve to cut his path before he reached the gap. Sweat-blinded, his blood pounding in his ears, he turned back along the far side of the lough.

But the end was never in doubt, and when the slower men turned aside to close the top end of the valley as well, Grace had nowhere left to go. He ground to a halt and the surging wave of the pursuit broke over him.

Kavanagh, hurrying down from Ballynaslieve, arrived moments too late to preserve Dr. Grace from violence. But he waded into the scrum bellowing, "Leave off now—leave off when I tell you!" And by the time he reached the heart of the melee, much of the fury had gone out of it and, a little shamefaced, the men fell back. One of them handed him a gunmetal-grey bowl.

David Grace was curled in a muddy ball, the prints of cleated boots plain on his dirty clothes, and could have been dead. Kavanagh knelt beside him, lowering his big body cumbrously, and touched

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his shoulder. After a moment Grace unwound. His nose was bleeding and his lip was split.

Kavanagh sighed and tried to apologise. "I never meant for that to happen. We had to stop you, but I never wanted you hurt. Oh, I know you'll talk about this. We'll have the police to deal with. But as long as you've no proof, nothing to show the museum people, there'll be no dig. They may be inclined to believe you, but they won't risk large sums of public money on your word alone."

He was right and Grace knew it. He gave it one last try. "This site has been in continuous occupation from Neolithic times to the present day. It would be the most important in Ireland. It has to be excavated. Please, give me the chalice."

Kavanagh stood up. The crowd round them parted and he walked thoughtfully towards the lough, weighing the silver bowl in his hands. Grace guessed what he intended and his battered body responded to the surge of furious adrenalin. He got to within a pace or two of the publican before hands from the crowd dragged him to a halt. He shouted, "No!"

Kavanagh looked back at him, his eyes mild. "I'm sorry." Then he hurled the chalice from him with all his strength, and it tumbled for a moment in the clear air before the lough received it with barely a splash. A small ragged cheer went up.

"Damn your eyes, Pat Kavanagh," whispered Dr. Grace, sinking to his knees in the mud.

Someone said, "Who's that?" and they all looked up the valley.

It was a man in green wellies and a bright blue anorak. He had driven down the track from Ballynaslieve in his new blue four-by-four, and had now got out and was watching them.

Kavanagh said, "That's Mr. Hiram Bernstein of the Slieve Crum Power Scheme." And he waved the man towards them.

Grace, too tired to stand up, looked at the engineer, hating him. He hated his new blue car. He hated his clean green wellies. He hated his flash blue jacket with the words "Slieve Crum Hydro-electric Scheme" emblazoned on the front.

Hydroelectric? On reflection, Grace thought he could make his peace with that jacket.

When Bernstein reached them, he looked doubtfully at Grace and said, "What's going on here?" He was an American.

The hands still holding Grace withdrew guiltily. Kavanagh said, "A little misunderstanding, just." He hurried on: "Are you here to survey for the power scheme?" and the American nodded.

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Grace hauled himself to his feet. "Where will you build the dam?"

Bernstein pointed down the lough away from Ballynaslieve, to the gap where the stream became a waterfall. "There."

"How big a flood-back do you expect?"

"All this bog between the mountains," said the engineer, "as far as you can see and then some."

They all turned towards Ballynaslieve, just visible towards the head of the valley. Then they looked at Kavanagh, and Kavanagh looked at David Grace and understood why, under the mud and the blood, he was smiling. He said, very carefully, "You're going to flood the valley?"

Bernstein looked surprised. "Of course. How else do you make hydroelectric power?"

"There must be some misunderstanding. We all live there. In Ballynaslieve."

"Don't worry about it," Bernstein said briskly, "that's all been taken care of. They're building you new homes in a nice modern housing estate, with bathrooms and a bus every half-hour."

If he had announced his intention of machine-gunning them, the men of Ballynaslieve could hardly have looked more shocked.

"But—I was born in that house."

"You'll be compensated," said Bernstein.

"What about our sheep?"

"You'll be compensated."

"Will they build me another pub?"

"No, but you'll be compensated," said the American.

The full horror of it was sinking in. After the dam was built and the level of the lough rose, Ballynaslieve would cease to exist. Its community of displaced souls in a city's suburbs could be paid for that, but not compensated. Everything that Kavanagh had told Grace about Ballynaslieve was true, but no one wanted to leave it.

All eyes turned then towards Pat Kavanagh. It was Pat who had brought the American here; Pat who persuaded him of the valley's suitability, of the residents' cooperation; Pat who got the backing of the area's political representatives. No use now for Pat to claim that nobody mentioned flooding, that he had expected the power station to burn peat.

Desperation fuelling inspiration, he seized Grace like a brother. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bernstein, but I don't think you'll be allowed to flood. Not now. Dr. Grace here is an archaeologist, he's been checking the place over for the National Museum in Dublin. He's found all sorts

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of interesting things. Haven't you, Dr. Grace?" He shook the smaller man by the sleeve. "Haven't you?"

"Have you?" Alarmed, Bernstein looked round him. He saw nothing.

"Oh yes," insisted Kavanagh. "A passage grave. From the Boyne group. Some Bronze Age earthworks."

The American was still looking. "Where?"

"And a chalice," cried Pat. "Would you credit that?—a silver chalice, left by the first Christians who settled here. Ballynaslieve has been in continuous occupation from Neolithic times to the present day. Dr. Grace is going to organise the most important excavation ever carried out in Ireland. Isn't that right, doctor?" Again he shook the archaeologist urgently.

Bernstein too was watching him with concern. "Is that right? You found a chalice here?"

David Grace looked up the valley towards Ballynaslieve. The place was at his mercy. Every house there would disappear unless he stopped this scheme. Every man here would be a refugee, unless he came to their rescue.

He looked at the anguish in Pat Kavanagh's face and sighed. "It's like Mr. Kavanagh said. There was—"

"A passage grave? Earthworks?" The engineer knew exactly what that would mean, staggered under the implications. "My God, a chalice?"

"No, a misunderstanding," said Grace, without a flicker of conscience. "I found something, all right. I found old Mrs. Savage's teakettle. Who'd be interested in a thing like that? I threw it in the lough."

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a *NEW* short story by

SHIZUKO NATSUKI

From one of Japan's leading mystery writers, the story of a nearly perfect crime . . .

A MIDNIGHT COINCIDENCE

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

As the boy finished each question in his homework, he glanced down at the clock on his desk then gazed out through the thin net curtains at the street for a few moments. He was not looking at anything in particular, just resting briefly before checking the time again and moving on to the next problem in the book before him. He was studying for his university entrance exams and liked to time himself to see how long each question took to complete.

His room was on the second floor of a town house and the window faced south, looking out over the garden and a road to a rather seedy old apartment block opposite. The area he lived in was in the throes of being redeveloped and contained a curious mixture of expensive apartment blocks and old, cheap buildings with no apparent order.

It was one of those hot, sticky nights that only come at the end of the rainy season.

At about one-forty in the morning of Tuesday, July 16, a figure approached the eastern end of the apartment building opposite. The night was so hot that the door of the apartment on the ground floor had been left open, with just a light net screen propped against the jamb to keep the insects at bay. The boy had often noticed this before and guessed that the window on the opposite side of the building was likewise left open in order to let the air travel through the room.

The figure paused outside the door for a few moments while it peered in, then moving the screen to one side, it disappeared inside.

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There was no sound from inside the apartment.

The boy turned back to his desk and solved another problem. The time was just coming up to one fifty-five when he looked out of the window again in time to see the shadowy figure come back out into the street. He watched uninterestedly, expecting the visitor to close the screen door again as he left, but he didn't and hurried off down the street at a brisk pace.

He solved two more problems and, as the time was coming up to two twenty-five, he wondered whether he should call it a night and go to bed. He glanced out the window again and noticed someone else approaching the apartment opposite. He was not sure why he thought it must be someone else, but they were coming from the opposite direction and he had the impression that their clothes were different.

The figure looked into the room for a moment, then slipped in through the open screen door, turning sideways to squeeze through the gap. This time the visitor stayed less than five minutes, squeezing past the screen door again, leaving it open still as he vanished into the night.

The boy remained at his desk until two forty-five, but he did not see any more movement in the night outside. As he slipped into bed, he could not help but wonder why it was that both of the visitors to the apartment on the opposite side of the street had left the screen door open when they left.

1.

It was a little after noon on the sixteenth of July when the victim's mother, Toshie Kuroda, discovered the body and telephoned the police.

"It's Mitsuo— I think he's— Please come quickly."

She did not ring the emergency number but dialed the local police direct. Her son had been in trouble so often in the past that she knew the number by heart.

Several officers hurried to the scene and found the victim, Mitsuo Kuroda, lying on a bed in the farther of the two rooms, wearing a T-shirt and shorts. He was covered with a thin cotton blanket and there was a knife protruding from the region of his stomach. The bed was surrounded by empty beer bottles and cans.

"I have not been home much recently, but when I popped in today to see how he was getting on, I found . . ."

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"Was the door open when you got here?" the chief detective, Ochi, asked, nodding towards the front door.

"Yes, on a hot night like last night, he usually slept with the door open." She went on to explain that one of the other tenants in the building had left a screen door behind when he moved and Mitsuo had propped this in the opening in place of a front door. "However, when I arrived this afternoon, the screen was half open and I squeezed through the open space."

Ochi nodded, he had done the same when he arrived.

The window in the bedroom had also been left open and there was another screen wedged in the space.

"So you were not at home last night then, Mrs. Kuroda?"

"No, to tell the truth, I have not been here for the last two months. Ever since he got out of prison, we have done nothing but argue so I went to stay with my daughter in Ikebukuro for a while. I thought that if he was left on his own, he would run out of money and be forced to find a job."

"When did he come out?"

"On April the tenth. I stayed here with him for about a month but he still hung out with that bike gang and spent all his money on drink and gambling."

"So he has been out for three months now . . ." Ochi muttered to himself and the other officers exchanged glances. They all knew why he had been in prison because the incident had occurred in their area.

The local station chief and Yokokawa, the chief detective from central headquarters, arrived soon afterward, to be followed by the murder squad and the identification team, who brought a doctor with them. The atmosphere became very tense.

The doctor ran his hands over the body, then removing the blanket that covered it, he began his examination.

It could be seen now that Kuroda had also been stabbed in the chest, as his shirt was cut and there was a large amount of blood.

The middle-aged doctor thrust his face up to the wound and studied it carefully before continuing his examination. He moved the body onto one side and the blood that had collected in the chest ran out onto the bedding.

"Well, the victim has received one wound in the chest and three in the left stomach area," he said eventually.

"Which do you think was the cause of death?" asked Yokokawa.

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"The wound in the chest reached the heart and I think death must have been instantaneous."

"So you think that the murderer stabbed the victim in the heart, then continued to stab him three more times in the stomach to make sure?"

"Yes, that is quite possibly what happened."

"Or I suppose there could have been more than one person involved in the attack."

The knife protruding from the body had an ivory-colored plastic handle and appeared to be buried approximately two or three inches into the body. Yokokawa looked around the room.

"There does not seem to be any sign of a struggle so would it be safe for us to assume that the victim was attacked in his sleep?"

"Yes, in all four wounds the knife entered the victim with a clean stroke and if there had been a struggle, the wound would have been more untidy."

"Can you give me some idea as to when the attack occurred?"

"I would say that death occurred approximately twelve hours ago, give or take an hour either way."

"That puts it at some time between one and three this morning then."

Yokokawa turned to the victim's mother, who was standing blankly in one corner of the room.

"What time did your son generally go to bed?"

"It varied, but he was generally in bed some time between eleven-thirty and twelve. He was usually drunk by then and it took a lot to wake him."

"I see, well, to recap on what we know . . ." He spoke in a clear voice for everyone to hear. "The victim was sleeping in this room with only a net screen over the entrance when he was stabbed in the heart at some time between one and three A.M. and died immediately. The murderer then stabbed him three more times in the stomach, leaving the murder weapon in the wound when he escaped. If there was more than one attacker involved, it may be that they took it in turns to stab the victim."

"Either way, they must have hated him very much," the station chief muttered to himself. Several of the detectives nodded in agreement.

At that moment the doctor, who had not seemed very happy about something, looked up.

"There is one more possibility."

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"What's that?"

"While I cannot be sure right now, there is a chance that the knife used to make the wound in the chest is different from the one that was left in the stomach." The body would be taken to the morgue for a proper autopsy, and once that was completed, he would be able to say for sure. "As you can see, the knife in the wound is about one inch at its widest, probably four or five inches in length, and has a very thin blade. However, the wound in the chest is about twice that width, and might have been made by a thick-bladed knife of the kind a chef might use."

"So that would mean that it *was* the work of more than one person," Yokokawa said. "One was armed with a chef's knife and the other with this small fruit knife and they both stabbed the victim, one aiming for the heart while the other one stabbed him in the stomach. I suppose there must have been something special about the chef's knife that would make it identifiable, so they took it with them when they left. If we search the area, we might be able to find it."

"There might be another answer to the riddle," the doctor said, "but I won't be able to say for sure until I have completed my autopsy."

Yokokawa gave him a puzzled look.

"Considering the depth of the cut, there is very little bleeding from the wounds in the stomach, although it might be that the blood has collected inside the stomach without coming out."

"What do you mean?"

"It is possible that the three wounds in the stomach were inflicted after death."

"So that would mean that one person stabbed the victim in the chest with a chef's knife, causing death, then someone else stabbed him immediately afterward in the stomach with the other knife."

"The second set of wounds need not have been made immediately afterwards, it could just as easily have been done an hour or even three hours later."

Yokokawa sank into thought, but none of the other detectives in the room seemed to think it was a very difficult case. Their thoughts had all turned to the same person.

2.

Mitsuo Kuroda had been sent to prison for killing a child in a motorcycle accident in January of the previous year. He was now

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twenty-two years old and had had a number of jobs in various factories and offices since his graduation from high school, but none of them had lasted long. For about a year preceding the accident, he had not had a proper job at all, just doing part-time work when he needed the money. He'd joined one of the local bike gangs and when he was not working, he could usually be found riding around the area on his 400cc motorcycle.

On the day of the accident, he had drunk two bottles of beer at a friend's apartment before heading home on his bike. As he reached a pedestrian crossing near his house, he did not notice a nine-year-old girl who was crossing the road and struck her, causing her to die from multiple fractures.

He was charged with speeding, dangerous driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, and ignoring a red traffic signal, so nobody was surprised when he was sentenced to one year in prison. He wanted to appeal, but the lawyer provided by the state told him it would do no good. He was not allowed any parole and remained in prison the full year until his release in April.

Inspector Ochi reflected on the incident as he left the scene of the murder, and after returning to the station to meet Detective Sato, the traffic officer who had been in charge of the accident investigation, the two of them went to visit the relatives of the dead girl, Satsuki Miyoshi. The house was only about three hundred yards from where Satsuki was struck on her way home from visiting a friend.

"She was only nine years old, but everyone says that she was very cute and the image of her mother. Of course I never saw her while she was alive, but she looks very nice in the pictures I have seen." At thirty-two, Sato was three years junior to Ochi, but as he had dealt with the accident from the beginning and had the confidence of the child's family, it was decided that he should accompany Ochi on his inquiries. "Worst of all, she was an only child, so the family took it very badly."

Ochi also had two young daughters and he could understand how the family must have felt.

"I take it that they are still living in the same house then."

"Yes, it is a company house so they cannot leave whenever they like and anyway, the wife works in a local nursery school."

The child's father, Norio, was thirty-six at the time of the accident and worked for a major oil company; his wife, Wakako, had been only thirty-three or four.

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"If she works for a kindergarten, she must like children very much," Ochi muttered as Sato pulled up to the curb outside a five-story building. The Miyoshis lived on the second floor.

Sato pressed the buzzer and announced that he was the officer who had rung earlier that day. The woman who came to the door was dressed in a white blouse and a fawn skirt; although it was a subdued outfit, she looked very fresh.

"Oh, hello," she said when she saw him. "It is very good to see you again, please do come inside."

They were shown through to the drawing room where Sato introduced Ochi to her. She gave him a guarded look, which was strange as they had yet to tell her what their business was.

Sato looked over at the small Buddhist altar which stood on top of the sideboard.

"When I was here last time, you had a picture of Satsuki on it," he remarked.

"Yes, but I have put it away now. I found it difficult to bear looking at her photograph every day."

Wakako was a pretty woman with shoulder-length hair and a light sprinkling of freckles over her nose. She had gentle eyes and her lips were well-shaped. She seemed to be the type of woman who was happiest in the home, Ochi thought.

"Time passes quickly, doesn't it, it is hard to believe that it is already a year and a half. Is your husband well?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I seem to remember that Satsuki's grandmother lived nearby. That is your mother, isn't it?" Sato led the conversation. "She was very upset about the accident but I hope she has managed to get over it a bit more now."

"I suppose so, but I don't see very much of her these days."

"What happened after the court case, did you get your compensation?"

"We got the money from the insurance company." She dropped her head and frowned. It was obvious that she did not want to talk about that now, but the two detectives could not ignore it.

"The insurance should pay a maximum of twenty-five million and it is only fair that you should have received the full amount, but what about the driver, didn't he pay any damages?"

"Our lawyer tried several times, but in the end we had to make do with just the insurance. The driver was unemployed and so had no way of paying. His mother worked in a supermarket to support

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him but he did nothing and anyway, he did not appear to be the slightest bit sorry for what he had done."

"So that was it then?"

"Yes, but even if we could have got some more money, it would not have brought Satsuki back."

"All the same, it must be very hard to bear. He has served his sentence but has made no attempt to make up for what he did. It would appear that he went back to his mother's apartment as soon as he was released and spends most of his time at home as if nothing had happened. He is obviously not sorry for what he has done or he would have looked for a job and tried to pay you something from his wages."

"The apartment where Kuroda lived is not far from here," Ochi put in, speaking for the first time since he was introduced. "Did he come and apologize to you after he was released?"

"No." Wakako bowed her head even deeper and her whole body tensed.

"Did you know he had been let out?"

"Yes, one of the neighbors told me."

"So you do not know how he lived after he came out?"

"No, not at all." She raised her voice a little and they could hear that it shook.

Ochi left that line of questioning and tried a different approach.

"I take it then that you know nothing about today's case?"

"Eh?"

"Mitsuo Kuroda has been found murdered in his apartment."

Wakako sat without moving for a few seconds, then lifted her head. Her eyes were wide and her mouth hung open with surprise. She seemed to have forgotten to breathe for a minute, then she took a deep breath.

"Is this true?"

"Yes, his mother found the body a little after noon today."

Wakako panted briefly, then her face crumpled as she burst into tears. She tried to speak but was too overcome. Finally, she covered her face with both hands and sobbed.

Ochi's first impression was that she was putting it on and he watched every movement closely. However, her reaction was so unnatural that he found himself wondering if it could not be genuine after all. Not sure what to think, he looked over at Sato.

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3.

An investigation headquarters was set up in the local police station, with Inspector Yokokawa and three others from central headquarters staying to lend a hand.

While Ochi and Sato were with Wakako Miyoshi, the other officers made house-to-house inquiries and checked on the victim's acquaintances. At eight o'clock that night, a conference was held to enable them to fill each other in on their results.

"All the Miyoshis' neighbors agreed that they were very attached to their child, all the more so for the fact that it took them a long time to have one. Mrs. Miyoshi was told that she was incapable of having children, but four years after they were married, they were successful and Satsuki was born." Sato spoke enthusiastically. All the families living in the building worked for the same company and were on speaking terms with each other, so it had been easy for him to get the information.

Norio and Wakako Miyoshi had been married for fourteen years. They had met through the volleyball club at high school and had married as soon as she was graduated from university. They were both quiet, home-loving people and Wakako in particular loved children, although for some reason she seemed to be unable to have any of her own. After they had been married for three years she went to see a specialist and it was discovered that she suffered from a defect of the womb and it was very unlikely that she would ever become pregnant. In those days, artificial insemination was unheard-of and they were talking of adopting a child when unexpectedly she managed to become pregnant and Satsuki was born.

The company Norio worked for made it a policy to move the staff around every four or five years. When Satsuki was born, they were living in Kumamoto, although Wakako had stayed with her mother during much of her pregnancy. Then they moved to Sendai, where they lived until they came to their present apartment in Tokyo three years earlier. Satsuki went to the local primary school and as soon as a vacancy came up, Wakako went to work at a nearby kindergarten.

"If Satsuki ever caught a cold, her grandmother would come to look after her and Wakako did not have to worry about a thing. She was so happy that all the other women in the building were jealous of her, but the accident changed everything."

"When you say grandmother, I take it that you mean Wakako's mother?" Ochi asked. "Did she live with them?"

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"No, she only came when Satsuki was sick. She said that she did not like looking after the child much and as soon as she recovered, she would return home."

Ochi nodded, this was much the same story as he had heard from Wakako herself: it was what happened after the accident that he was interested in.

"After the accident, Wakako was much more upset than her husband and almost went mad with grief. She attended the court every day to make sure that there was no mistake, and she was very angry when Kuroda was let off with only one year in prison. After he was let out, she was spotted by several people standing outside Kuroda's apartment, and he made it even worse for her by the way he acted.

"Kuroda showed no signs of regret, in fact he seemed to think now that he had finished his sentence, he could begin again with a clean slate. He had been banned from driving for two years, and this was still in effect, but he had been spotted on a motorbike several times by people in the neighborhood.

"Wakako told one of her neighbors that it drove her mad to see him walking around a free man. She said that she would not be surprised if he did the same thing again and that he deserved the death penalty for what he had done."

Ochi had already given his report, so everyone could see the difference between what she said and what she had in fact done. Did that mean that her rather false reaction to the news of his death had been play-acting after all?

If Kuroda's death had been motivated by revenge, she was a much more likely suspect than her husband. Ochi had asked in a roundabout way whether she had an alibi for the previous night and she had told him that she'd stayed at home alone. When asked where her husband was, she said that he had gone to Osaka on business but that he should return that day.

After he left her, Ochi went to see Norio at his office, but he still had not returned. His superior confirmed that he had gone to Osaka and when they phoned the branch there, they learned that he had arrived shortly after lunchtime and had not been on his own since. After work, he had gone out drinking with three colleagues until eleven-thirty and they had seen him back to his hotel afterward. They still wanted to talk to him in person, but in the meantime, it would appear that he had a good alibi.

"I think that if it was Wakako, it would only be natural for her to wait until her husband was out to make the attack," Yokokawa pointed out.

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Eighteen months had passed since Satsuki's death and it would appear that her grief and hatred had not faded at all. She had waited for Kuroda to come out of prison, then watched him to learn his habits before she struck. Nobody objected to this point of view and several of them obviously felt that the case was now as good as closed.

"There is still one problem we have not been able to answer though." Yokokawa looked down at his notebook as he spoke. "Kuroda's autopsy was performed this afternoon and it confirms what the doctor suggested when he first examined the body. That is to say that the wound to the heart and those to the stomach area were made with different weapons. The wound to the heart was two and a half inches long, and made by a knife one and a half inches wide and a quarter of an inch thick, so the overall length of the knife was probably in the region of four inches. The point of the knife reached the heart and there is no doubt that the victim died within approximately ten seconds of being stabbed. However, we have yet to find any trace of this weapon."

He looked around at the men gathered in the room before continuing.

"On the other hand, the fruit knife was left in the wound, having been driven approximately three inches into the body and piercing the intestinal tract. This knife is only one inch in width at its widest point, and one twenty-fifth of an inch thick; it was responsible for all three wounds in the pelvic area. There were no fingerprints on the handle, but the most important thing as far as our investigation goes is that none of the wounds made by this weapon showed any sign of causing a vital reaction, although they would be quite enough, on their own, to cause death. There was already some speculation that the wounds to the pelvic region were inflicted after death, but we can now say, with certainty, that this was the case."

"How long after the fatal blow to the heart was this done?" one of the officers inquired.

"After the heart has stopped, any subsequent wounds cause minimal bleeding and the body shows no vital reaction, but it is impossible to tell from an autopsy whether it was done ten seconds after death or one hour.

"It would appear that two or more people were involved in this attack. That the first assailant inflicted the wound to the heart, causing almost instantaneous death, and his accomplice, not knowing the victim was dead, proceeded to stab him three more times in the

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stomach." This was what Yokokawa had guessed at the scene, but it was beginning to look as if it would not be so easy. "However, a witness has turned up whose statement throws a different light on the story. He is a high-school student who lives in the house opposite the victim's apartment and I think we can accept his story as being quite trustworthy."

He nodded to the detective who had interviewed the boy and let him take over the story. The officer rose to his feet and started to read the statement:

"That night I was studying in my room when at about one-forty A.M. I saw somebody open the screen door and enter the apartment opposite. The person left again approximately ten minutes later. At two twenty-five A.M. a second figure entered through the half-opened screen door, this time staying for about five minutes. I thought later that there was something a bit strange about their behavior because in both cases they left without replacing the screen door behind them."

Obviously the detectives had questioned the boy closely to try to get a description of the victim's attackers but that night he had had the air conditioning on so the windows were closed, and he was looking through lace curtains, which meant he could not even tell whether the visitor had been a male or female.

"I think the first person was wearing a shirt and trousers. His hair? I don't think it was very long. The second visitor was wearing a baseball cap and a jacket, I think."

Although he was not able to tell them any more, his statement lent more credence to the theory that two separate people had visited the victim's house that night, both with intent to kill him.

4.

The following day, the officers who were investigating Kuroda's acquaintances came across a possible second motive for the crime.

The day before the murder, July the fifteenth, at approximately four P.M., Kuroda was leaving his local pachinko parlor when a middle-aged man walking down the sidewalk ran into him, knocking the prizes he had won to the ground. Kuroda lost his temper and attacked the man viciously, kicking and hitting him mercilessly. The police were not called into the matter, but a passing housewife saw the injured man leave in a small white car and she had noted down the number, so they were able to trace him without difficulty.

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The man's name was Satoshi Shigekura and he was president of the Shigekura Architectural Office. Ochi hurried over to the office to see him and when Shigekura entered the room, he could see how badly Kuroda had hurt him. There was a large bruise spreading from his left cheek to his chin and his lip had been split. Ochi got straight to the point and asked him about the fight with Kuroda. When he did so, Shigekura became very defensive and demanded to know why the police should interest themselves in something like that.

"I was on my way back to my car after doing some shopping when a man came out of a side entrance and collided with me. He was at fault, but you would not think so to hear him. I told him to watch where he was going and carried on my way, but as I did so, he suddenly attacked me."

He liked to think of himself as being self-controlled, but he had practiced kendo when he was younger, and before he realized what he was doing, he started to fight back. However, he was no match for the youth and was lucky to get away without any worse injuries.

Ochi listened to what the man had to say about the incident then told him that Kuroda had been murdered the night before and watched his reaction closely.

Shigekura did not say anything; his lips tightened a little and he sat watching Ochi's face.

"Actually, we have a statement saying that a small white car matching the description of your own was seen in the vicinity of the victim's apartment on the night of the fifteenth."

A spark of anger kindled in Shigekura's eyes and he turned to one side.

"Are you trying to pin this murder on me? There must be thousands of cars the same as mine in Tokyo." He slammed his fist on the table and rose to his feet, telling Ochi that he was a busy man.

There was some doubt as to whether the director of an architect's office would go so far as to murder a man over a stupid fight like that, but some of the team believed he may have felt so humiliated that he had lost control and decided to revenge himself on the youth. They now had two suspects and things were beginning to come together. However, with both Shigekura and Wakako, their whole case was based on supposition and there was no concrete evidence to implicate either of them.

They were still unable to discover the weapon that had been used to inflict the fatal wound to the heart and they still had not managed

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to trace the owner of the fruit knife that was left in the stomach.

Five days after the murder, Shigekura and Wakako were asked to come in to the police station, where they were subjected to an arduous grilling.

An elderly, soft-spoken detective handled Wakako's questioning. He sympathized with her at losing her only child in such a sudden fashion and told her he realized how hard it must have been for her since Kuroda was released from prison.

"Even I sometimes feel that the law is too lenient and people like that deserve to die." This was not an exaggeration and several of the other officers felt the same way. But his plan was to put her off guard and then trick her into admitting to the murder once her defenses were down. If they managed to get one of them to admit it, it would only be a matter of time before the other gave up his pretense.

However, Wakako proved much stronger than they had expected. She protested that she had spent the whole night in her apartment and had not been anywhere near the scene of the murder. She denied having ever spied on Kuroda's movements and accused people of reading more into her actions than they should. She insisted that rather than spy on Kuroda, she had spent her whole time trying to forget his very existence, as that made the ache easier to bear.

"No matter how much I may have hated him, even if I were to kill him, it wouldn't bring back Satsuki, would it?" she demanded with tear-filled eyes, and the detectives found that they were the ones unable to answer for a change.

Shigekura obviously felt it was ridiculous that they should even suspect him.

"Why would I want to go and kill him? I admit that I lost my temper for a moment and made a bit of a fool of myself, but it would not be worth wrecking my whole life just to get my own back. I am not that much of an idiot."

He became more angry as the questioning drew on, and in the end, he told them that he had a lot of work to do and demanded he be allowed to leave.

It was very frustrating for the interrogators, as they did not have a shred of actual evidence to go on. There was enough circumstantial evidence for them to bring the couple in, but there were no witnesses who had seen them near the scene of the murder, and so they could not afford to be rough and try to force an admission out of them. They called them in for two days running, but by the evening of the

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second day they were still up against a brick wall.

Of course they could always have a warrant issued against them whether they admitted the crime or not, but the problem in this case was that they did not know which of the two had actually killed the victim, and until they could discover that, they could not know what to charge each with. As there was no evidence, it was impossible to decide.

On the twenty-third of July, exactly one week after the murder, Yokokawa went to visit a state's attorney he had worked with on several cases in the past, and explained the problem he was having with the case. The attorney folded his arms.

"If this was a case of bodily harm, we could use 207 to arrest them."

"Oh, you mean the simultaneous assault clause."

This law stated that if a person was attacked simultaneously by two or more people and it was impossible to tell who inflicted a particular wound, they could all be arrested, even if they did not know each other and were not acting in concert. It was only used on very rare occasions, however.

"Unfortunately, that can only be used in cases of bodily harm, not murder, so I am afraid you cannot charge them both as accomplices to murder."

"How about attempted murder for both of them?"

"If both attacks were made almost simultaneously and the wounds from both caused vital reactions, but it was impossible to tell which suspect was responsible for the actual death, it would be possible for you to charge them both with attempted murder—we have several examples of this in gang fights where nobody could be sure who did what—but I am afraid that in your case the autopsy showed that death occurred within ten seconds of the blow to the heart, whereas the wounds in the stomach seem to have caused no vital reaction. That is to say that the person who stabbed the victim in the stomach was stabbing a dead body, and if you tried to prosecute them for murder, their defense could have the case turned over as a *délit impossible*—an impossible crime."

That is what Yokokawa had been afraid of. Legal theory as well as past decisions in the courts all agreed that if the object of the crime was not achieved and if the method could be proved impossible for achieving that object, then the case would be considered a *délit impossible* and dismissed. There had been examples of hit-and-run drivers being released after it had been proved that the victim was

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dead before he was struck by the car and this present case would involve the same principle—you could not kill a dead body.

"So if you can prove which of the two suspects was responsible for the wound to the heart, that person can be charged with murder while the other person will have to be freed," the state's attorney said.

"But that is the problem, there is no way of finding out who struck the first blow unless they talk."

"In that case there is a chance that both of the cases could be ruled *délit impossible,* but I doubt that even then they would go completely unpunished. At the very least you can charge them with mutilating the body."

"What would that get them? Three years?"

Yokokawa could not hide his disappointment. It was obvious to him that both of them had entered Kuroda's room with the express purpose of killing the youth, and yet if he could not prove which struck the fatal blow, they could not be prosecuted and would probably get off with a minimal sentence. Worse yet, if they both stuck to their stories and denied ever having been near Kuroda's apartment that night, he would not be able to charge them with anything and they would go free.

"But a case like this is very unusual. I am sure that if you keep looking you will come up with the clue you need." The attorney promised that he would discuss the case with his colleagues and look for any similar cases in the records, but he did not sound very hopeful.

When Yokokawa got back to the station, he reported his conversation to the rest of the investigation team and could almost see the fight go out of them. Although there were three detectives from central headquarters to help them, most of the men on the case were local officers and they could remember the incident a year ago when Kuroda killed Wakako's daughter. None of them had liked Kuroda's attitude at the time and from what they'd heard of the way he had acted since being released from prison, more than a few were sympathetic to Wakako. They felt that Kuroda deserved to die and had not pursued the case with their usual zeal, so when they heard that they were unlikely to get a conviction on murder, they felt even less inclined to go on.

"All the same, it seems rather too much of a coincidence," Ochi remarked, "that a woman who has held a grudge for over a year and a man who did not have a motive until the previous day should

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enter the same apartment within forty-five minutes of each other and stab the same victim. As a result we are unable to discover who the murderer is and they are both safe. If this is really what happened, they must both have more than their fair share of luck."

Yokokawa remembered the attorney remarking that it was a rare case and he tried to work out what the odds must be against it happening; they must be thousands to one. It was as if they'd had supernatural help, but he refused to believe that. However, he could not believe that it was pure luck either.

"One thing I noticed about the suspects," Ochi remarked, "is that when we told them of Kuroda's death they both reacted rather strangely. They both seemed to be acting the way they felt they should react. Wakako burst into tears and could not talk, while as soon as I asked Shigekura about his trouble with the victim the night before, he became cross and indignant. He had told us a few minutes earlier that he rarely lost his temper, then contradicted himself by becoming quite emotional. Both of them seemed quite unnatural to me, almost as if they had planned how they were to react before we arrived. They had worked themselves up so much that in the end they overacted."

"If they were both acting, it would mean that the whole case was not a coincidence after all," Yokokawa said.

Ochi nodded. "Yes, quite possibly."

"But if it was not a coincidence . . ." one of the other men said.

"If it was not a coincidence, it had been planned that way," Yokokawa said, warming to his theme. "They worked together and planned it so we would not be able to tell who dealt the fatal blow. They knew that by doing it this way we would not be able to charge either of them with murder and at the very worst they would go to prison for two or three years."

"But they wouldn't have had time to plan all this," someone objected. "Shigekura and Kuroda didn't have their argument until approximately four o'clock on the afternoon before the murder. He couldn't have had time to meet Wakako and make a plan of this complexity in the time left to them."

"Exactly," Yokokawa replied; he had realized the same thing even as the other spoke. "Shigekura created the motive purposely. He waited for Kuroda to come out of the pachinko parlor then barged into him in order to start the fight. Kuroda had a bad squint and had been teased about it since childhood, so if Shigekura was to make some comment about it when they collided, it was quite likely

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that it would start a fight. By doing that, it would appear that he had a motive quite independent of Wakako, but maybe they had planned it that way in advance."

5.

If Wakako and Shigekura had planned to commit the murder in this way, they must have known each other well beforehand, but there was no trace of this at all. The investigation changed its focus to finding some kind of connection between the two, making house-to-house inquiries and checking with all their acquaintances, but to no avail. Ochi went to visit Wakako's husband, Norio, at his office but as they had expected, he denied all knowledge of any relationship between his wife and Shigekura.

"We married fourteen years ago and moved to the Kumamoto branch almost immediately. At first, she was told that she would not be able to have any children, but luckily, four years later, Satsuki was born and my wife devoted herself to looking after her. The next year, we moved to Sendai where we remained for six years and we only came back to Tokyo three years ago. As soon as Satsuki was old enough to enter primary school and my wife finally had some time to herself, she decided to fulfill a long-standing ambition and went to work in a local kindergarten. Having a full-time job as well as looking after our daughter, she did not have time for anything else, I can assure you."

He appeared to have realized what Ochi was after and spoke in a soft but convincing fashion.

"Do her parents live in Tokyo?"

"Yes, her mother is here."

"Oh, of course, Satsuki's grandmother. We heard that she sometimes came to look after her grandchild."

"Yes, but only when Satsuki was sick or something."

Her name was Midori Nagasawa and she would be fifty-four that year.

"Wakako's father died while she was still in junior high school and Midori raised her on her own. I believe that she is still working now."

Norio's tone became a little strained and Ochi guessed that he did not get on very well with his mother-in-law. It occurred to him that Wakako might have confided in her mother what she did not tell her husband and he decided that it would be worth paying her a visit. He asked Norio for her address.

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"I am afraid that I do not know the address offhand, but I can tell you how to get there."

Ochi had him draw a map for them. It would have been much easier for them just to ask Wakako for the address, but that would have tipped her off and would allow her to silence her mother before they could get to see her.

Midori Nagasawa lived in an apartment on the fourth floor of an elegant, eight-story building, about ten minutes' walk from Naka-Meguro station. Ochi and Detective Hashizume of the local branch arrived there at about six-thirty, but when they found that she was out, they decided to split up and wait, Hashizume in the elevator lobby on the fourth floor and Ochi at the main entrance. At around seven-thirty a lot of tired-looking men arrived back from their offices but there was still no sign of Midori.

At a little after nine, a woman in a yellow suit and carrying a large bag walked through the front lobby to the elevators. Ochi was looking in the opposite direction when she arrived and by the time he turned, he could only catch a glimpse of her from behind as she stepped into the elevator. He told himself that this was not the woman he was looking for, but when the elevator stopped at the fourth floor, he waited for it to return before going up to check.

As the door opened, he met Hashizume hurrying back down the corridor.

"Did you see a woman in a yellow suit come up here just now?" he asked.

"Yes, she is the one we are after, I saw her enter room 408."

"Are you sure? She looked very young."

"Yes, I was not able to get a look at her face but she took a key out of her bag and let herself into the room." When the elevator arrived, he had pretended to be looking out of the window until she passed, then followed her down the corridor.

They hurried along to the room and Hashizume rang the bell.

"Yes?" came a deep, woman's voice. "Who is it?"

They announced themselves and the door swung open to let them enter. The woman was still wearing the yellow suit, although she had undone the buttons of the jacket to reveal a T-shirt with a silver design that matched her earrings. The effect was to make her look much younger than she was, but there could be no doubt as to her identity, as she was the image of her daughter Wakako.

"Are you Mrs. Nagasawa?" Hashizume asked, just to make certain.

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"That is correct."

He told her that they would like to ask a few questions in connection with the Kuroda murder and she led them through to the living room. She indicated that they should make themselves comfortable on the sofa while she sat on a chair facing them.

"I hope you will excuse me for saying so, but you look very young. What age were you when you had Wakako?"

"I was twenty years old when I had her and she is thirty-four now."

"And she had her child when she was twenty-four?"

"Yes, so I was a grandmother at forty-four," she replied with a smile.

Sitting face to face with her, they could see that her face was lined, but she was tall, with a good figure, a pretty face, and a sophisticated manner that combined to create the impression of a successful businesswoman.

"I understand that you are still working?"

"Yes, that is correct. I am the manager of an art gallery in Aoyama. I have been working there for twenty years now."

She explained that after her husband died, she had gone to work in a coffee bar in Aoyama and when her boss decided to open a gallery in the same building, he asked her if she would be interested in managing it. While she was working in the coffee bar she had often made suggestions about the decoration and running of the business and he saw in her just what he needed to run his new venture.

"I have not been to art school or anything, but I love paintings and leapt at the chance."

"I see . . ." Ochi said, wrenching his attention away from a print on the wall opposite him. "To change the subject a bit, I don't suppose you ever met Wakako's friend Satoshi Shigekura?"

He pretended that it was an established fact that Shigekura and Wakako were acquaintances, in order to test her reaction, but if he was expecting a naive grandmother, he was disappointed. She merely put her head on one side questioningly and showed no other emotion.

"He is a forty-three-year-old architect with an office in Shin-Okubo."

The press had not been informed of the fact that Kuroda had been attacked by two different people or that Wakako and Shigekura were the main suspects. If Midori knew anything about the case,

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she would be shocked to know that the police were already onto them both and would probably show it in her manner.

"No, I am sorry, I don't believe I have had the pleasure," Midori replied, shaking her head but not showing any emotion.

"I hear that you often used to look after Satsuki," Ochi continued, changing the subject again.

"No, not really, I just used to pop around to see her every now and again." She looked very sad and wrung her hands on her lap.

"I hear that Wakako came back to stay with you during her pregnancy."

"Yes. Norio was at the Kumamoto branch in those days and she did not know anyone there, so I had her come back and live with me until the child was born."

"You mean here in this apartment?"

"No, I was still living in Setagaya in those days."

"Did she return to Kumamoto after the birth?"

"Of course."

"I believe that in the following year, that is 1982, they went to live in Sendai."

"That is correct."

After graduating from university in Tokyo, Shigekura had gone to work for a major architectural office in the capital. From 1981 to 1983 he had gone to America to study there, then in 1984, soon after returning to Japan, he had started his present business. Another group of detectives had been involved in checking on Shigekura's background, but from what Ochi had been able to gather, the only place that he and Wakako could have met was in Tokyo.

"I suppose you went to visit Wakako while she was living in Kumamoto or Sendai?" Hashizume asked, taking over from Ochi.

"Yes, well, I did go two or three times."

"Are you sure that she never mentioned Shigekura's name to you when she was living in the country?"

"Wakako is a very domestic type of woman, you know, especially after Satsuki was born. She devoted herself to her daughter." She spoke quite calmly and did not seem to be at all upset.

It was beginning to look as if it was going to prove impossible to link Wakako with Shigekura and Ochi found himself feeling increasingly pessimistic about the way the case was going. It looked as if they would have to go back to the theory that Shigekura and Wakako had just happened to both try to kill Kuroda on the same

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night. He felt that the odds were a thousand to one against that happening, but there was no other explanation.

6.

Despite renewed investigations, they could find nothing to tie Shigekura in with Wakako.

"After he graduated from university, he entered a major firm of architects with a staff of over five hundred. The president of the company thought very highly of him and he soon worked his way up through the company and even married the boss's daughter, Fusako. In the spring of 1981 he went to New York with his wife to study town planning and stayed there until 1984. Soon after he came back to Tokyo, he went independent and founded his present company which, from all reports, is doing well," one of the investigators told Yokokawa and the others.

It was rumored that one of the reasons why he left his father-in-law's company was that he and Fusako were not getting along very well and this put him in an awkward position at the office. Although they had not been able to find out the reason for the breakdown, it would appear that it was not a happy marriage. Fusako had studied fashion while they were living in New York and had gone to work for a designer on her return, so they saw very little of each other. They had no children.

It was well-known that Shigekura had a mistress. She was thirty-eight years old and worked for a furniture importer. Their affair had lasted for more than five years. She lived on her own in an apartment in the fashionable Roppongi area of Tokyo and when the police went to interview her, she admitted to their relationship without a moment's hesitation.

"She said that she had no plans to marry him at the moment. She had a painful divorce herself and Shigekura is still married, but she gave me the impression that she would be happiest if things were just left as they are," reported the elderly detective who went to see her. "I must admit, I can't understand what younger people are thinking of half the time," he added, shaking his head.

"We have been quite unable to find anything to tie Shigekura in with Wakako. Wakako became pregnant after she had been living in Kumamoto for three years, and two months before the child was born, Shigekura moved to the States. By the time Wakako returned to Tokyo, Shigekura had already started the affair with his present

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mistress, so I can see no way that they could have got together," Yokokawa said.

"Why don't we interview them together? They might let something slip," one of the detectives suggested.

"No, I think we should ask them down to the station separately and let them run into each other in the corridor. If we watch their reactions carefully, we may be able to learn something."

This was to be the final test.

They were under pressure to produce some results and the two suspects' reactions would decide how the case progressed from here.

And so it was that on the afternoon of the twenty-sixth of July, ten days after the murder, Shigekura and Wakako were asked down to the station for the final time.

Wakako was called in an hour before Shigekura, and Ochi went over her story yet again, although he was not able to learn anything new. When he heard that Shigekura had arrived, he told her that she could leave and he and another officer accompanied her down the corridor towards the entrance.

At the same time, two officers led Shigekura down the corridor in the opposite direction and the two groups met at a corner. Shigekura and Wakako came face to face and it would have been impossible for them to ignore each other even if they wanted to. Ochi and the other officer watched Shigekura's reactions while the two men accompanying Shigekura watched Wakako. They were determined not to miss a thing and all but held their breath as they continued their scrutiny. They stood like this for several seconds, then the men with Shigekura moved out of the way to let the others pass.

Shigekura was questioned for a further hour but they could not learn anything new so he was allowed to leave. After he had gone, the four detectives met with Yokokawa and the two detectives from central headquarters.

"I watched Shigekura very carefully, but he did not appear to know her at all. He looked neither surprised nor scared and did not appear to be trying to hide anything," Ochi said, giving them his impression. He was obviously disappointed, but his colleague had been unable to detect any change in Shigekura's behavior either.

"Wakako was the same," said one of the other pair of detectives. "She neither looked closely at him nor pretended to ignore him. We were all wearing suits and I think she just assumed he was another detective . . . that is the impression I got, anyway."

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They all agreed that Wakako showed no indication of ever having met Shigekura before. This, combined with failure of the house-to-house inquiries to bring up any leads, meant that they would have to face the fact that it seemed most unlikely they had been working together.

Yokokawa folded his arms and gave a sigh. They could not arrest them as accomplices in murder and until they could find out which of them struck the fatal blow, it would be pointless trying to charge either of them with murder, as the case would probably be thrown out as being a *délit impossible*. Rather than let them get off scot-free, it might be better if they were both just charged with mutilating the body. Although the odds were thousands to one against, it would appear that by some fluke the crime had fallen through a loophole in the law and the perpetrators stood a good chance of going free. He decided to visit the state's attorney again that day or the next and see if he had managed to come up with anything new, but until then there was little else they could do.

On his way back to his desk, Ochi ran into Sato, the traffic officer who had accompanied him to Wakako's house the first time. After that he had returned to his own duties and had nothing more to do with the case.

"Excuse me if I am sticking my nose in where it is not wanted, but I heard that you were going to call Shigekura in today and I caught a glimpse of him when he arrived at the desk. . . .

"I saw him two weeks ago when he was first brought in, but then his face was badly bruised and he had a bandage over it. . . ."

Sato spoke rather slowly and Ochi had no idea what he was trying to get at.

"It is funny, when I saw him today, I felt that he reminded me of someone, but I could not remember who it was, then it came to me just now. That girl Satsuki who was killed in the traffic accident, she looked very like him in some ways."

"What?"

"Of course, I never saw Satsuki while she was alive, I only saw photographs of her. That is why it took me so long to realize who it was."

Ochi remembered Sato mentioning that Wakako had had a picture of Satsuki on the family shrine.

"But Wakako got pregnant while she was living in Kumamoto, and Shigekura lived in Tokyo the whole time."

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"But they look so similar that it is hard to believe they are not related. She resembled him a lot more than Wakako's husband."

Ochi had heard that Satsuki resembled her mother and they had been unable to find where Wakako and Shigekura could have met. However, if it was true that Satsuki also resembled Shigekura, where would that leave them?

Suddenly he had an idea and telephoned his wife. He had two daughters and he asked her for the telephone number of the gynecologist who had handled the births. He telephoned the hospital and got through to the man he wanted.

"Excuse me for taking your time like this, but it is part of a murder investigation. What I want to know is, until what age can a woman have children?"

"Anything up to about forty-five," the doctor replied. "Sometimes we see people who are pregnant at forty-six or -seven, but forty-five is usually the limit. It does not make much difference whether it is a first pregnancy or not, as the baby can be delivered with a Caesarean operation."

Satsuki's grandmother was fifty-four years old.

He could visualize her face, so similar in many ways to her daughter's. Satsuki was nine years old when she died the year before, which meant that her grandmother was still only forty-four when she was born.

7.

When he checked the Miyoshis' family register, he found that Satsuki was entered on the eighth of May, 1981, as their own child and there was a birth certificate to that end.

When Ochi telephoned Wakako to ask about her family register, he also asked which hospital she had gone to to have the child.

"I went back to stay with my mother while I was pregnant, err . . . I think it was called the Yamashita Gynecological Hospital in Matsubara. My mother lived in Matsubara at that time." Even over the telephone, she sounded very worried about the direction the questioning had taken.

Next Ochi went to visit the hospital, where he was greeted by the chief doctor, a man in his early sixties. He asked about Satsuki's birth, explaining that it was a murder investigation and that anyway, it would not violate the privacy laws to tell him the details. The doctor went through the files and soon came back with the one he was looking for.

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Name of child: Satsuki Nagasawa.
Time of birth: 1:05 A.M., May 8, 1981.
Mother's name: Midori Nagasawa.

It went on to list the weight, et cetera, but Ochi already had what he wanted. Where did Satsuki Nagasawa change to Satsuki Miyoshi?

"The birth certificate? One of the family members gets a copy from the local authorities, fills in the necessary parts, then I fill in the details I just told you and put my seal on it. After that, they just have to take it to a council office to have it registered."

"What if somebody was to get a form, then fill in all the details themselves, using a fake seal? If they were to do that, would they be able to register a child under a different name?"

"I don't see why the council office would not accept it. I know that in all the years I have been in practice, they have never telephoned me to check up any details."

Midori Nagasawa was asked to appear at the police station on the morning of July 28. Inspector Yokokawa and Ochi did the questioning themselves. With a copy of the hospital records placed before her, she could not pretend any longer.

"Yes, Satsuki was my child."

"And the father was Satoshi Shigekura, wasn't it?" Yokokawa leaned forward eagerly.

Midori remained silent for a moment before replying.

"Yes," she replied in a low voice, tears glistening behind her eyelids. After that she replied calmly to all their questions with no further displays of emotion. She had known what to expect ever since Wakako telephoned to tell her that the police wanted to know where Satsuki was born.

Eleven years earlier, Shigekura had visited the gallery in Aoyama where he met Midori and they soon fell in love. At that time he was only thirty-two while she was forty-three, a gap of eleven years, but it never seemed to affect their relationship. He had married the boss's daughter two years earlier, but already he could feel that they were not suited to each other and their marriage was not very satisfying.

"About six months later, I realized that I was pregnant. He had already decided to go to study in the States with his wife the following year and we both knew that that was when we would part."

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At this time Wakako was twenty-three and had been married for three years, but she had not been able to have any children. She loved children, so much that she planned to become a teacher at kindergarten, and she had already talked with her husband about adopting one.

"Even though I knew our affair would not last, I decided that I wanted to have his child. I discussed it with Wakako and that was when she told me about her plans to adopt a child. She said that if I did not want to raise the child myself, she would take it and raise it as her own."

She told Shigekura that she intended to have the child, it was already too late for her to abort, but that she would be giving it to her daughter to adopt so he could forget about it.

Wakako's husband agreed, although he did not seem to be totally happy with the idea. However, once Wakako returned with the child and they lived together as a family, he soon forgot his doubts and treated her as his own child.

"I helped to look after Satsuki when she was sick, but apart from that I tried to keep my distance. I thought it would be best that way. I did it for Norio and anyway, Wakako loved the child more than I ever could. I was happy to have borne the child of my lover and Wakako was totally involved in raising her."

Shigekura had returned to Tokyo three years later but by that time he had lost contact with Midori. She had told him about the birth in one of her letters but she never mentioned the child again and over the years they stopped writing.

It was four years after his return to Japan that he came to the gallery to see her. He told her that he had left his father-in-law's company and started up in business on his own. He told her how things were between him and his wife, that they could not have any children and did not want any. It was then that he asked about Satsuki. She told him that the Miyoshis had recently returned to Tokyo to live, that Satsuki was very happy, and that they were raising her as their own child.

"A little while after that I had a call from him saying that he just happened to be passing their house when Satsuki came home from school with her satchel on her back. She had her school badge on her jacket and looked like a little angel. . . ."

As she talked about Satsuki, her voice trembled and tears glistened in her eyes once more.

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"I don't know if he passed the house by accident or not, but he made no attempt to contact her after that. Every now and again I would get a call from him asking how she was and he would sound relieved when I told him she was all right."

After the accident, Midori telephoned to tell him what had happened. Wakako took it the hardest, going mad with grief. She attended the court every day during the case and when she heard the verdict, she ground her teeth in rage, saying the sentence was far too light for the crime.

When Kuroda came out of prison, Wakako found his whole attitude intolerable. She spied on his apartment and when she saw how easy it would be, she decided to get her revenge.

"Of course, you would soon have guessed that she was responsible and it was bad enough having lost Satsuki to that insane biker without letting Wakako throw her life away too."

She bit her lip and dropped into silence again.

"And that is when you asked Shigekura for help, wasn't it?" Yokokawa prompted. "You acted as a go-between and arranged for the two of them to stab Kuroda separately. You knew that if we could not discover who made the fatal blow, we would not be able to prosecute them for murder, the most we could charge them with would be mutilating the body, and as neither of them left any evidence, we couldn't be certain of making that stick. It was a very clever plan."

Midori remained silent a little longer, then spoke in a low voice.

"Of course they did not leave any evidence, neither of them was there."

Yokokawa looked at her in amazement.

"As you guessed, Shigekura's fight with Kuroda was planned to make you suspect him for a while. The murder was done on a day when Norio was away on business and it was his job to make sure he had a strong alibi. If he became one of the suspects, you would immediately assume that he and Wakako had done it between them."

"You said just now that neither of them had anything to do with the murder, but in that case, who was responsible?"

"Me. I did it all on my own." She lowered her head. "I had heard about the way Kuroda lived from Wakako, and that night I borrowed a car from a friend and parked it nearby. The first time I entered the room was at about one forty-five. I moved aside the screen door that was all he had to block the entrance and went in to find him

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snoring on his bed. I stabbed him once through the heart with a chef's knife, then returned to the car, where I put on a hat and jacket. I hid the chef's knife in the car, then taking a thin-bladed fruit knife, I returned to the apartment at about two twenty-five. I stabbed the already dead Kuroda three times in the stomach and left the knife in the wound when I fled. I wore gloves both times so there was no danger of any of my fingerprints being found."

"How did you know about this loophole in the law?"

"The son of one of my friends works in the law department of a university and I remembered him discussing the *délit impossible* clause once. When I decided to get revenge on Kuroda, I visited a lawyer I know, telling him I wanted to write a mystery novel, and had him explain it in greater detail. All the same, it was a gamble from the beginning and I had made up my mind to give myself up if you actually arrested Wakako or Satoshi. I kept the knife I used to kill Kuroda just to prove my story."

She seemed strangely relaxed and gave a deep sigh. She looked out of the window, her eyes shining as if she were reliving some fond memory.

"Satsuki was my child. Wakako would have gone mad if Kuroda was allowed to carry on as he was, so it was only natural that I should be the one to get revenge."

"So it was not a coincidence after all," Yokokawa said to Ochi after the interrogation was completed. "Some friends of mine had an unmarried daughter who had a child and they registered the child as their own in order to allow her to marry in the normal way."

"Yes, you sometimes hear stories like that."

"I have never heard of a daughter adopting her mother's child like that before, though. I suppose it is a sign of the times."

Ochi reflected that Satsuki had been loved by four people, Midori, Shigekura, and the Miyoshis, and it was this love that had led to such a strange crime.

translated by Gavin Frew

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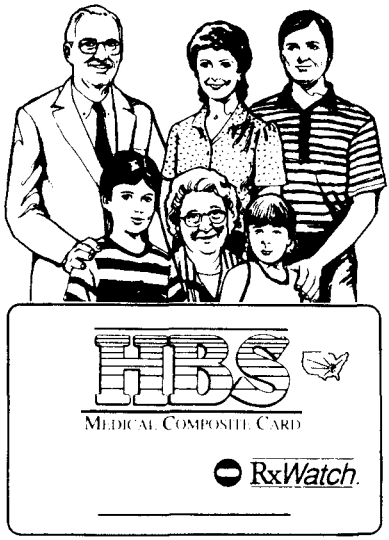

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Chief Inspector Ford frowned. "Has Fawcett ever been involved in any kind of dispute or unpleasantness with his neighbors?"

"None that I know of, sir. Of course, there was a bit of trouble with the Gypsies a while ago."

"What sort of trouble?"

"Every summer the same lot come for the potato picking and then the fruit harvesting. In between they do odd jobs—tree trimming and the like. The previous owner of the manor always let them pitch on his land and they turned up as usual this year, not knowing the place had changed hands. Mr. Fawcett ordered them off and things got a bit nasty; he came to me with a complaint." Gaskin's eyes slid past Ford to where the victim, now covered with a blanket, awaited the attentions of the ambulance crew . . .

HERE COMES A CHOPPER

by BETTY ROWLANDS

Chief Inspector Ford stared down at the man lying prone on the woodland path, arms sprawled out, blood and brains spilling from a gaping wound in the back of the head.

"Nasty," he observed unemotionally. "Hatchet job, by the looks of things."

Detective Sergeant Crane, younger and less experienced than his superior, breathed deeply and turned away as he fought to avoid vomiting.

No wind stirred the canopy of trees above their heads, nothing moved in the undergrowth, no birds sang. It was as if even the wildlife had been shocked into silence by the act of violence perpetrated in their midst. The two men waited without speaking while the pathologist, crouching by the body, completed his examination. Eventually he straightened up and peeled off his rubber gloves. "Single blow behind the right ear, probably struck from above with a heavy, sharp implement like an axe," he said and began repacking his bag.

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Ford showed neither surprise nor satisfaction at having his opinion confirmed. "Time of death?"

"Can't be too precise till we get him down to the morgue. At a rough estimate, somewhere between nine and twelve hours ago."

Ford looked at his watch. "Between eight and eleven o'clock yesterday evening?"

"That wouldn't be far out. You'll get my full report later." With a brief salute, the pathologist departed, leaving Ford to begin his own examination while a squad of scene-of-crime officers went into action around him.

"No footprints, the ground's too dry and hard," he muttered. He squatted beside the body. "Aha, what have we here?" With a pair of tweezers, he removed something from a leg of the trousers and held it up for his sergeant's inspection.

"Fibre from a rope?" suggested Crane.

"Could be." Ford dropped his find into a plastic envelope. "Check the trees on either side of the path."

"What am I looking for?" asked Crane.

If Ford felt irritation at the question, he gave no sign. "You heard what Doc Brewer said; the blow was struck from above. This guy's a good six feet tall—figure it out for yourself."

Comprehension dawned on Crane's stolid features. "You reckon he was tripped up and slugged on the ground?"

"It's been known to happen," said Ford drily. "Who found him, by the way?"

"Constable Gaskin, the local man. He was out jogging."

"Where is he?"

"Waiting in the patrol car."

"I'll have a word with him while you forage around."

As Ford approached, Constable Gaskin scrambled out of the car. He was a young man, thin and gangling in sweatshirt and jogging pants.

"Morning, sir," he said, standing smartly to attention.

"Morning, Gaskin. Know anything about him?" Ford indicated the body with a jerk of the head.

"Yessir. Mr. Fawcett from the old manor. These woods belong, er, *belonged* to him. The path leads from the village to his house."

"So presumably he was on his way home when he was killed. Any idea where he might have spent the evening?"

"Yessir." Gaskin smirked. "Wednesdays he has supper with Miss Irene and Miss Vera Tripp. Identical twins, they are, and the

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plainest pair of old biddies you ever saw . . . Folks round here call them the ugly sisters . . ." Gaskin was evidently about to enlarge on the Tripp sisters' lack of charm but Ford cut in.

"We're talking about Fawcett. What else do you know?"

"Not much, sir. He bought the manor and the adjoining land last autumn and lived there alone with a housekeeper. Used to drop in at the Crown two or three nights a week for a pint but never had much to say to the locals—except Miss Irene and Miss Vera. Their garden backs on to one of his fields. Calls there regular, he does. Some folks think he might be courting Miss Irene." A suppressed snigger made it plain that Gaskin considered the proposition not merely unlikely but ludicrous.

Ford frowned. "Has Fawcett ever been involved in any kind of dispute or unpleasantness with his neighbours?"

"None that I know of, sir. Of course, there was a bit of trouble with the Gypsies a while ago."

"What sort of trouble?"

"Every summer the same lot come for the potato picking and then the fruit harvesting. In between they do odd jobs—tree trimming and the like. The previous owner of the manor always let them pitch on his land and they turned up as usual this year, not knowing the place had changed hands. Mr. Fawcett ordered them off and things got a bit nasty; he came to me with a complaint." Gaskin's eyes slid past Ford to where the victim, now covered with a blanket, awaited the attentions of the ambulance crew. "Looks like they got their own back, doesn't it, sir?"

"No jumping to conclusions, Gaskin."

Crane came hurrying over. "Seems your hunch was correct, sir." He held up another plastic envelope. "Fibres on two trees, one on either side of the path, and marks where lichen has been rubbed from the bark. The bracken's been flattened in one spot where someone might have waited."

"Good man. Get the photographer to work on it."

"Already in hand, sir."

Ford gave a nod of approval. Crane's deductive processes might be a little slow but he was first-rate on practicalities, thank God. He turned back to Gaskin. "These two sisters—where do they live?"

"Saddlers Cottage, just up the road. Rambling, tumbledown old place . . ."

"And you say Fawcett had a regular Wednesday evening engagement with them. How long had this been going on?"

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For several weeks, it emerged. Gaskin was well up in village gossip and once again Ford broke in to stem the flood.

"So he would have used this path at about the same time every Wednesday?"

"It's the quickest way from Saddlers Cottage to the manor house."

"How long have the ladies lived in the village?"

Gaskin scratched his head. "Must be all of thirty years, I reckon."

"How well do you know them?"

"They've never been what you might call sociable. Miss Irene's pleasant enough, says good day if you meet her in the street, but Miss Vera's odd."

"In what way?"

"A bit childlike, as it were. Seems happiest when she's talking to children, especially the Gypsy kids." Encouraged this time by the interest in Ford's expression, Gaskin pressed on. "There's one called Reuben, a bit simple, he is. I've seen Miss Vera with him in the woods, whispering and giggling like a kid herself. Miss Irene, she don't approve, calls her sister away quite sharp if she sees them together."

"Have the ladies been told about the tragedy, by the way?"

"Shouldn't think so, sir. The path's been kept closed since I reported finding the body and no one's tried to use it while I've been here. Want me to tell them, sir?"

"Yes, do that. Break it gently, mind. I'll call and see them later."

"Yessir."

"Tree trimming, eh?" mused Ford on the way back to the car. "That means ropes and axes."

He repeated what Gaskin had told him and Crane gave a whistle. "If Miss Vera talks to one of their kids, the chances are the Gypsies knew about Fawcett's Wednesday evening date."

Something like a grin flickered over Ford's craggy features. "Well done, Crane. Let's go and have a look round their camp."

Apart from an old man, a handful of silent, staring children, and a raven-haired young woman with strong Romany features, the encampment was deserted. Her expression grew hostile as the two policemen showed their badges.

"We'd like to take a look round," said Ford.

"You got a warrant?"

Ford looked at her with raised eyebrows. "You got permission to be here?"

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Her black eyes glittered. "Twenty years we've been coming. That Fawcett's a newcomer. Who does he think he is to order us off?"

"*Was,*" corrected Ford. "He's dead."

She shrugged and turned away. "Good riddance," she muttered.

"He was murdered."

"So that's why you're here!" She rounded on him, her face dark with hatred. "As soon as there's trouble, you blame us!"

"Not if you're innocent. Now, if we can just get on with our search . . ."

"Please yourselves. You'll find nothing here."

A short while later, Ford emerged from one of the vans with an axe and a length of rope. He held them up for the woman to see. "There's dried blood on this axe. Any idea how it got there?"

"My man was using it to chop off some rabbits' heads."

"After lassoing them with the rope, I suppose?" She remained silent. "Where is he?"

The hatred in her eyes scorched his. "Working in the fields with the others. There's still some that don't begrudge us a living."

"Okay, we'll talk to him later. You'll get this stuff back when we've finished with it."

Returning to their car, the detectives came across a barefooted lad of about eleven years old, sitting on the grass with a cardboard box on his lap.

Ford squatted beside him. "Hello son, what've you got there?"

The child stared at him for a moment, then silently held up the box. Coiled on a nest of leaves, a half-grown grass snake gazed out with bright, lidless eyes.

"My, what a beauty!" said Ford in a gentle voice that Crane had never heard before. "Where'd you find him?"

"Under the hedge. I'm gonna train 'im."

"Great."

A sly look came over the child's grubby face. "I know somethin' you don't."

"Oh?" Ford's tone was casual, his eyes still on the snake. "What might that be?"

The child's voice dropped to a whisper. "It was Miss Pearl what killed 'im."

Ford's expression did not alter. "Killed who?"

" 'im at the big 'ouse, of course."

"Oh yes? How did you know about that?"

"Saw the fuzz in the woods and went to 'ave a look, didn't I?"

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"I see." Ford straightened up to relieve his cramped calves and brushed leaves from his clothes. "Who's Miss Pearl, then?"

The lad's eyes, suddenly bright with cunning, darted to and fro. "The wicked one," he whispered. "She killed 'im." He began to laugh uncontrollably.

"Reuben, come here!" The woman's voice, sharp with anxiety, rang through the encampment. The boy obeyed, head lowered, the box clutched under his arm, brown feet trailing in the dust.

"What did you make of that?" said Ford as they got back into the car.

Crane shook his head, frowning. "Search me, sir. I suppose that's the half-witted youngster Gaskin was talking about. D'you suppose he really does know something?"

"Hard to tell."

Crane started the engine. "Where to now, sir?"

"Back to the station to hand these in for examination. Then we'll call on the Misses Tripp."

The door of Saddlers Cottage was opened by a gaunt, sallow-faced woman of about fifty. Her mousy hair was knotted into a bun, accentuating her prominent upper jaw and receding chin. She had evidently been weeping, for her nose was red and her face blotchy.

"Miss Tripp?" Ford showed his badge.

"I am Irene Tripp." Her voice was surprisingly firm and resonant.

"Detective Chief Inspector Ford and Detective Sergeant Crane. We'd like to ask you and your sister one or two questions, if you don't mind."

She stood aside for them to enter. "I suppose it's about poor Mr. Fawcett. Constable Gaskin said you might be coming." Her voice faltered. "It's so terrible, I . . . we can't believe it."

She led the way to a stuffy, over-furnished sitting room where a mirror-image of herself, similarly clad in a shapeless blouse and grey woollen skirt, sat in an armchair. It was, Ford reflected, all too clear that the villagers' unkind nickname was justified.

"This is my sister Vera," said Irene. "Vera, these gentlemen are from the police. They've come about poor Mr. Fawcett and we must try to help them." Her tone had altered subtly, as if she were speaking to a child. Vera looked at the two men and simpered; plainly, she was far less affected by the tragedy than her sister.

Irene sat down and waved the detectives to a couch. Without waiting for either of them to speak, she burst out, "Chief Inspector,

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it must have been the Gypsies who killed him! Only last week they threatened to throw him into the duck pond!" There was a suppressed giggle from Vera which earned a frown of sisterly disapproval.

Ford cleared his throat. "I believe Mr. Fawcett had supper with you every Wednesday?"

"Yes. Last night was his birthday. He brought a bottle of champagne." Irene's face crumpled but Vera began to giggle again.

"I got tipsy!" she boasted and received a second glance of reproach. There was a girlish ring to her voice that was absent from her sister's and totally out of keeping with her appearance. Ford gave her an indulgent smile before turning back to Irene.

"Did he leave at his usual time?"

"Yes, about ten o'clock. He liked to be home before the Crown closed."

"He liked to pop in for a quick one!" sniggered Vera.

Irene bit her lip and looked down at her hands. "There's no harm in a man having a drink now and again," she murmured. "We . . . Vera and I . . . don't normally take alcohol. Last night was a special occasion."

"Quite so," said Ford. "What did you do after Mr. Fawcett left?"

"We locked up and washed the dishes. Then I had a bath and went to bed. Vera stayed down here and watched television."

"Did you hear or see anything unusual?"

The sisters looked at each other and then at him, shaking their heads. "Nothing at all," they said in unison. Their contrasting voices gave to the simple words the quality of a bizarre madrigal.

"Do you know of a lady called Pearl?"

The question appeared to take Irene by surprise. She looked sharply at Vera, who smiled blandly back at her and picked up a magazine as if she had lost interest in the conversation.

"No," said Irene after a moment's hesitation. "We do not. Why do you ask?"

"The Gypsy boy—" began Ford.

"If you mean Reuben," interrupted Irene, "I wouldn't waste time talking to him." Behind her, Vera drew a breath as if about to say something but at a gesture from her sister she pouted and returned to her magazine.

"He referred to a lady called Pearl," Ford continued patiently. "Are you sure you don't know who he meant?"

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"I have absolutely no idea," said Irene firmly. "That poor half-witted child lives in a world of his own."

"I see." Ford signalled to Crane, who put away his notebook and stood up. "Well, thank you ladies, you've been most helpful." Irene also got to her feet; Vera, absorbed once more in her magazine, did not so much as raise her head.

"You mustn't mind my sister," said Irene as she let the two men out the front door. "She has always been a little . . . immature."

"I understand," said Ford.

Impulsively, she held out her hand; he took it, and was surprised at the strength in her fingers. Beneath their reddened lids, her eyes were glittering. "Those dreadful Gypsy men must have killed him out of revenge," she repeated. "They must be caught and punished—it's a terrible thing when a man can't walk on his own land without being attacked."

"Rest assured, we're doing everything we can to trace the killer," said Ford gently. "Good day, madam."

Back in the car, Crane remarked, "Seems straightforward. The Gypsies had it in for Fawcett. They knew his habits, lay in wait for him . . ."

"There's a difference between a threatened ducking and murder," said Ford thoughtfully. "We'll wait to see if the lab report tells us something."

"D'you think those women were telling the truth when they denied knowing anyone called Pearl?"

Ford grunted. "Hard to say. I had the feeling Vera might have said something if her sister hadn't been there—and Irene hesitated before answering. Could have been surprise at the question, or . . ."

"Or they were hiding something," finished Crane.

Ford slumped in his seat, closed his eyes. "Stop off at the Crown. I could use a beer . . . and I want a word with the barman."

"Rabbit blood and the fibres don't match." Ford threw down the laboratory report. "And the Gypsies don't use the Crown because the landlord won't serve them. Return the rope and the axe to their owner, Crane . . . and while you're at it, see if the mother will let you have another chat with young Reuben. I'm beginning to be interested in Miss Pearl. . . . Maybe those two were hiding something after all."

An hour later, the detectives were back in Saddlers Cottage. The sisters were seated in the same chairs and wearing the same dowdy

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clothes as before. With their sallow faces, they reminded Ford of figures in a waxwork museum.

His first question brought an indignant rebuttal from Irene. "Inspector, I told you we know no one called Pearl."

"Sergeant Crane informs me that according to Reuben, you have another sister who twice attacked your parents with an axe."

Irene's hand flew to her mouth. Then she rounded on her twin, her eyes blazing. "Vera, what have you . . . ?" She checked herself and turned back to the policemen, while Vera cowered in her chair. "The boy was romancing, Chief Inspector. I told you, he isn't normal. Surely you don't believe this absurd fairy tale?"

"I'm investigating a murder, madam. I have to consider every possibility. Perhaps we could look over your house?" He edged towards the sitting room door. "Would you like to show us round?"

Irene gave a harsh laugh that bore no relation to her normal, pleasant speaking voice. "You don't seriously suspect us of concealing a deranged, homicidal relative in the house? That's preposterous . . . like something out of a gothic novel!"

"Shall we begin with the upstairs rooms?" Ford's tone was bland but his eyes were hard as flint. "Of course, if you insist, I can obtain a warrant . . ."

With a resigned shrug, Irene got to her feet. "That will not be necessary. Most of the rooms are used for storage," she informed them as they followed her into the hall. "Our parents travelled a great deal and brought back some rather bulky souvenirs."

That was an understatement. Room after room was cluttered with furniture and exotic artifacts that must have lain undisturbed for years. Cobwebs hung from ceilings and everywhere was the stale odour of disuse. Apart from the quarters occupied by Irene and Vera, who stood silently by while the detectives made their search, the place was virtually uninhabitable.

"Are you satisfied, Chief Inspector?" said Irene when at last they returned to the sitting room. "Do you now accept that no one lives here but our two selves?"

"Thank you for your cooperation." Ford's evasion of the question was pointed and earned an enquiring glance from his sergeant, but he paid no attention. He was looking at Vera, who was standing at Irene's elbow with a teddy bear clasped in her arms, her chin resting on its head. She returned his gaze with a hint of something like triumph in her eyes; suddenly, she tossed her head and smirked,

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like an impertinent child who has got the better of its elders. Pushing past the two men, she swept out of the room.

Irene turned to Ford. "Please excuse her," she said with quiet dignity. "As I mentioned before, she is very immature." She made sure the door was closed before continuing. "Now she is not here, I can explain. It all goes back to our childhood. Our mother was very handsome but as you see, we did not inherit her looks. We always knew we were a disappointment to her and we invented Pearl as a kind of compensation. We made her very beautiful, but also very naughty."

"And Miss Vera still clings to this childhood fantasy?"

"Exactly," said Irene eagerly. For all her plainness, she was not wholly unattractive. Her voice was warm, her manner compassionate and sincere.

"I imagine that explains the extra teddy bear in her bedroom," observed Ford.

Irene gave a low, nervous laugh. "You noticed that? Yes, Vera and I kept ours . . . and of course, Pearl had to have one as well. Each one had a different coloured bow so that we could tell them apart. Silly, isn't it, keeping a child's toy?"

"We all have our little foibles," said Ford, smiling. "Well, madam, I apologise for having taken up so much of your time."

"Not at all. I assume there is no further news?"

"I'm afraid not. Our investigations will continue, of course."

As Irene led the two men to the front door, there was a muffled thud beneath their feet.

"What was that?" asked Crane.

"I heard nothing," said Irene, but her voice shook and her face turned pale.

"The cellar!" shouted Ford. "Of course, a house this age was bound to have a cellar! Where's the entrance?"

"In the larder," faltered Irene. Ford pushed past her and strode along the flagged passage to the kitchen, with Crane behind him. When she caught up with them, they were standing by a trap door, open to reveal stone steps leading down into a musty dimness.

"Inspector, please . . . there's nothing down there but more junk."

"Stay there and keep an eye on her, Crane."

Taking a flashlight from his pocket, Ford began a cautious descent. For a moment, Irene struggled to escape Crane's restraining hands, then capitulated and slumped against the wall. "All right,

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she's down there." Her voice was little more than a croak. "Please, let me go to her first . . . you'll frighten her."

"Don't alarm yourself, Miss Irene." Ford's voice had the same gentle quality as he had used when speaking to Reuben.

The cellar walls were lined from floor to ceiling with crude wooden shelving. Every inch of space was stacked with junk—old books and pictures, ornaments and carved curios in wood and stone, shawls and rugs, mementoes of countless trips to remote parts of the world, all lying neglected under a shroud of dust and cobwebs. The air was dank and stale; it seemed to Ford as if there had been no movement in the place for years. And then, as if in mocking contradiction of that very thought, there came out of the darkness a slow, rhythmic creaking, gradually increasing in intensity, while a high-pitched, childish voice began to sing.

"Ride-a-cock-horse, to Banbury Cross
To see a fine lady ride on a white horse."

The beam of Ford's flashlight picked out the shape of a door in one corner. The voice came from behind it. Now, it was raised in a different song.

"Oranges and lemons, say the bells of Saint Clements."

Almost hypnotised, Ford went and stood by the door, listening to the nightmarish words of the old rhyme.

"Here comes a candle to light you to bed.
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!"

The final words were uttered in a tuneless shriek, followed by a peal of infantile laughter that brought a prickle to Ford's spine. He went to the foot of the stairs.

"Come down here, Crane," he called.

"What about Miss Irene, sir?"

"Better bring her with you." Ford raised his voice. "No tricks, Miss Irene, if you please!"

"Inspector, I beg of you . . . !" She stumbled down the steps with Crane at her heels. Ignoring Ford, she rushed over to the door and beat on it softly with open palms.

"Pearl darling, please come out," she pleaded, her voice unsteady with emotion. "Here are some gentlemen to see you. Be nice to them, Pearlie. . . . Please be good . . . please!"

They waited. The singing and the laughter had stopped; only the soft rhythmic creaking broke the silence. At a gesture from Ford, Crane took the distraught woman by the shoulders and moved her to one side. She buried her face in her hands, all her resistance gone.

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Cautiously, Ford lifted the old-fashioned latch; to his surprise, the door swung inward.

A grey light filtered through a dusty window covered by a grating, high up in one wall. The small, bare room was empty except for the old-fashioned rocking horse that stood in the middle of the floor, still moving gently as if its rider had only just dismounted. Propped on its worn saddle and held in place by the reins was a teddy bear with a scarlet ribbon tied in a bow round its neck. In one corner, neatly coiled like a cowboy's lariat, was a length of coarse rope.

"Come along, Miss Pearl, playtime's over," said Ford, as if he were coaxing a child. There was silence. He called again but there was no answer.

"Perhaps there's another way out," suggested Crane. He moved past his chief and peered round the door.

"Get back, you fool!" shouted Ford, seizing him by the arm and dragging him away just as Vera, her eyes wild and her hair in disorder, sprang out from behind the door, grasping an axe in her uplifted hands. She aimed a blow at Crane's head, missed, staggered forward with the momentum, and almost fell. The head of the axe struck the stone floor at her feet, became detached, and went spinning on its side into a corner.

With astonishing agility, Vera recovered her balance and attempted to dive past the two policemen to the door. Her strength was formidable; it took them several minutes of violent struggle to wrench the empty haft of the axe away from her and pin her arms, while her sister stood by, wringing her hands.

"D'you suppose Irene knew Vera had topped Fawcett?" asked Crane. They had delivered their prisoner into custody, summoned the family doctor and a woman police officer to attend her sister, and were at last free to enjoy a restorative pint of real ale in the bar of the Crown.

Ford considered the question while watching his tankard being filled. He took a long pull before answering. "I'm sure she genuinely believed at first that the Gypsies were the killers. Later, when she realised what yarns Vera had been spinning to Reuben, she must have begun to wonder what had been going on in her poor deluded head . . . and then when Vera went sneaking past us with Pearl's teddy bear and looking very pleased with herself, Irene must have suspected that she had been up to something."

"How did you know it was Pearl's teddy?" asked Crane.

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"I noticed that the other two were very worn and shabby, as you'd expect a child's favourite toy to be after being carted around and played with for years. But the one with the scarlet bow looked almost new."

Admiration made Crane's wooden countenance appear almost animated. "So Vera slipped out while Irene was in the bath, leaving the television on, set up her trip rope, and waited for Fawcett with her chopper," said Crane. "The cunning thing must have been planning it for weeks."

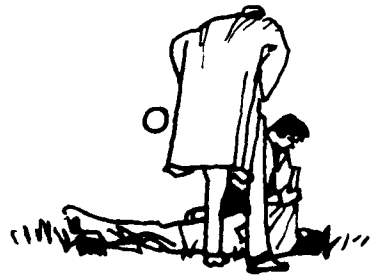
"Probably. If she'd kept her mouth shut instead of spinning Reuben all those yarns about Pearl, she might even have got away with it."

"Wonder why she took such a dislike to Fawcett?"

Ford shrugged. "Perhaps she was afraid he was going to come between her and her sister . . . or maybe she was jealous. You never know what goes on in a mind like that." He sighed and shook his head. "Poor Miss Irene, life didn't give her much of a break."

Crane finished his drink and stood up, holding out a hand for Ford's empty tankard. "Same again sir?"

"Thanks."



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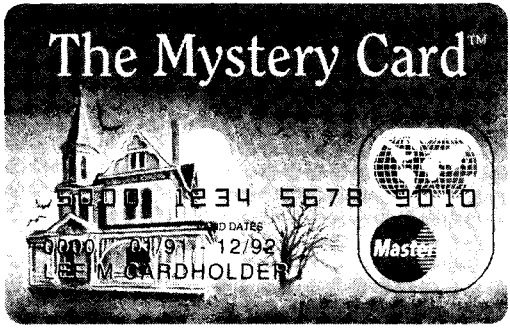

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

A sizeable percentage of the new mystery fiction published in the United States is the product of one house: St. Martin's Press. Thus, it is not surprising that the firm sometimes appears to be competing with itself. For example, they have published the cases of no less than three Utah-based private eyes, the best of them Robert Irvine's Moroni Traveler. And within a three-day period in November 1991, they published two first mystery novels with very similar titles, both well over three hundred pages in length and both set in ancient Rome. Ron Burns's *Roman Nights* is the shorter of the two and, surprisingly, the more expensive ($22.95), but my historical mystery consultant assures me the other is much the better. It is discussed below along with some other first novels of promise.

**** Steven Saylor: *Roman Blood,* St. Martin's, $19.95. Gordianus the Finder is a Roman private investigator, something like Sherlock Holmes (he amazes his client's slave/messenger with off-the-wall deductions in the first chapter) and something like the hardboiled American P.I. (he tells his own story, has an active sex life, engages in much physical action, and repeatedly describes his dreams). Employed by the young advocate Cicero, preparing to defend Sextus Roscius in the Forum on a charge of parricide, Gordianus visits all strata of Roman life and gives a vivid (and obviously exhaustively researched) picture of ancient society to go with the complex puzzle, patterned on a real case. This is a remarkable achievement. If the awards-givers can find a better first mystery published in 1991, I want to read it.

*** J.F. Freedman: *Against the Wind,* Viking, $19.95. In the first novel of a prominent screen-writer, Santa Fe attorney Will Alexander, in crisis both professionally and personally, tries to salvage his career by taking on the defense of four biker outlaws accused of murder. There is less of a real detective puzzle than might have been hoped, and the hero's personal/sexual life embodies some very familiar, sometimes tiresome stuff, but the trail scenes are expertly done and most readers will keep going to the end.

** Ann M. Williams: *Flowers for the Dead,* St. Martin's, $17.95. The well-known reviewer and fanzine editor's first novel has some nice social observations and character touches with an unusual sleuthing team worth meeting again: D.A.'s investigators Brian Kayne and Theresa Scanlon. There's even a mischievous cat character for readers who enjoy such. The California-based novel loses impetus in the latter stages when the author opts for pure suspense rather than any real surprise.

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**** Peter Lovesey: *The Last Detective*, Doubleday/Perfect Crime, $18.50. In a rare present-day mystery, historical specialist Lovesey introduces Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond, a sleuth unenamored of modern aids to police work like computers and DNA typing who longs for the real detective work of figures like Fabian of the Yard. When a woman's body is found in a reservoir south of Bristol, Diamond heads the investigation of a complicated case involving some newly discovered letters of Jane Austen. Lovesey is one of the best writers of pure detection now active, and this ranks with his best. For a penetrating insight into the English character, see the paragraph on page 51 beginning, "I've got a brother-in-law in Doncaster. . . ."

**** Cyril Connolly and Peter Levi: *Shade Those Laurels*, Pantheon, $20. In the middle 1950s, revered British critic Connolly wrote most of this erudite detective novel and published the first part in the March 1956 issue of *Encounter*, but on his death in 1974 it was left unfinished. Levi has done an admirable job of writing the final section based on Connolly's notebooks. Connolly was heretofore best known in the crime/thriller field for his Fleming parody "Bond Strikes Camp," and this tongue-in-cheek country house whodunit has a touch of James Bond at one point as well. Beautifully written and full of learned and sophisticated talk—literary, artistic, culinary, horticultural—this is best recommended to readers who find Michael Innes and Amanda Cross too dumbed down. Be assured it contains a genuine and very clever mystery plot, albeit one that Levi gives away in his introduction. Though he gives appropriate warning, the solution might better have been discussed in a postscript.

*** Julie Smith: *Dead in the Water*, Ivy, $4.99. Edgar-winner Smith returns to her first series sleuth, the likable San Francisco lawyer Rebecca Schwartz, in a fast-reading tale of murder at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Note to specialist collectors: for reasons I can't reveal, this novel occupies a special place among culinary mysteries.

*** Stuart M. Kaminsky: *Rostnikov's Vacation*, Scribners, $19.95. Rapid changes in the Soviet Union (if there still is one by the time you read this) have made the Edgar-winning series about Russian cop Porfiry Petrovich Rostnikov more intriguing than ever. Whisked off to a vacation on the Black Sea with wife Sarah while colleagues Karpo and Tkach work on cases back in Moscow, Rostnikov has a holiday no more carefree than most series detectives.

*** D.F. Mills: *Deadline*, Diamond, $4.50. Here is a rare courtroom/romantic suspense hybrid with an increasingly popular type of protagonist: the true-crime writer. Tess Alexander's coverage of the murder trial of former Texas governor Ross Chandler is made difficult by her mental blackouts, causing her to fear she is afflicted with the Alzheimer's disease from which her mother suffers. The various elements are nicely handled, and the

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solution to Tess's problems is well enough foreshadowed that I felt I should have anticipated it—but I didn't.

** Robert J. Randisi: *The Dead of Brooklyn,* St. Martin's, $18.95. Nick Delvecchio, in the likable, low-key tradition of Randisi private eyes, tries to save his priest brother Vinnie from a possible murder charge in the death of a sexy parishoner, while working on the side for a victim of spousal abuse. At least some aspects of the solution may strain credibility, but the author's stripped-down prose and narrative flair make for fast and enjoyable reading.

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, though regarded by Raymond Chandler as "the top suspense writer of them all," has been out of print for years. Now a new trade paperback ($10) from Academy Chicago reprints her classic *The Innocent Mrs. Duff* (1946) back to back with *The Blank Wall* (1947) in a one-volume format recalling the old Ace Doubles. The same introduction by her son-in-law and literary executor Peter Schwed precedes both novels.

For readers looking for knowledgeable reviews and commentary on the mystery genre, here are a few more suggestions. *Mystery News* (P.O. Box 1201, Port Townsend, WA 98368-0901; bi-monthly; $13.95 for six issues), published in a handsome tabloid-newspaper format, is not new, but its staff of reviewers seem sharper and harder to please than in years past. The issue examined (vol. 10, no. 6, September/October 1991) ran 32 pages and included a lead article on Jeremy Brett's Sherlock Holmes and a first-person piece by novelist Earl Emerson. *The Crime File* (Laurie Mansfield Gore, Box 1321, Bonita, CA 91908-0890; quarterly; $12 for four issues) is more of a general fanzine, including among its features Marvin Lachman's "The Short Stop," devoted to a review of short stories, including the contents of *EQMM*. The issue examined (vol. 10, no. 2) is 24 8½ × 11 pages and features a lead review of Peter Lovesey's *The Last Detective* (see above) with a Lovesey checklist. *Mostly Murder* (Mostly Book Reviews, Inc., 2614 Hood Street, Dallas, TX 75219) is a quarterly distributed free in many bookshops across the U.S. and Canada; while positive notices predominate, discouraging words are not entirely absent, and the reviewers (ranging from mystery novelists to dealers to academics to fans) tend to write very well.

If you associate the late *New Yorker* cartoonist Charles Addams with any fictional genre, it's probably horror (thanks mainly to the Addams Family of TV and movie fame). But he drew enough spouses contemplating domestic murder to fill any number of mystery anthologies, so I won't hesitate to claim this genius for our field. *The World of Charles Addams* (Knopf, $30) includes a selection of several hundred cartoons, plus 24 color covers, spanning the years 1932 to 1988. Wilfrid Sheed provides an informative introduction.

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a *NEW* short story by

MILT ROSEN

"Peter, he'll turn us in. If there's a two-penny reward he'll turn us in. He's a weird guy . . ."

THE EYEWITNESS

by MILT ROSEN

Half of a small sweet roll hadn't done it. Peter was still hungry. "It just teased my stomach," Peter said. "I should never remind my stomach there's something called food."

Kurt didn't respond. His mind was off somewhere. He had the remote downward look that often clouded his face when he was about to start a painting. One of the many paintings that nobody bought.

As they walked along Bergen Street, Peter went on, "I hate nice weather like this. It makes me think of food. I prefer rain and storms."

Kurt finally looked up. He glanced around. Seeing no one else in the street except his best friend, he reached into the inside pocket of his shabby brown jacket and came up with an object. "A gun?" Peter asked. "What are you doing with a gun?"

"It's my new hobby."

"Where did you get a stupid gun?"

"I traded for some paints."

"You gave up your paints? You're crazy."

"This can get us new tubes. And money for food."

"And ten years in jail. Not to mention a beating from the police. You know how vicious the police have become."

Returning the weapon to his pocket, Kurt shook his head sadly. "Aren't you desperate? I'm desperate."

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"We're students, not street thieves, armed robbers."

"Hungry students. Peter, I'd like a real meal. Some decent clothes. Stockings without holes. A clean white shirt. All that's holding my shirt together is the dirt. I'm tired of sketching on pieces of paper other students throw away. A few pennies for a real model."

They turned the corner and started to stroll down Grillparzer Street where merchants were opening their shops, rolling up their awnings, turning on display lights, preparing to serve the few lucky people with money to spend.

As they passed Maramatt's Furs, Peter said, "You wouldn't know how to lurk around in alleys. You look guilty now and we're only walking. The police clubs would have a picnic with your back."

"We're pretty smart. We could learn very fast."

"You wouldn't make it to your twentieth birthday. I intend to make it to mine. Kurt, there's a pawnshop a few blocks from here. We could get enough for a few decent meals."

"Thank you very much. Forget we spoke."

The street was beginning to fill with shoppers. Peter ogled a pretty woman in a light-blue dress and a toque crowned with blue-and-yellow cloth flowers. She seemed to be about twenty-five. As she passed the young men, Peter smiled at her broadly. She ignored both the smile and the smiler. Kurt laughed. "We don't have to use the gun, Peter. We could steal purses from helpless women."

After what seemed an eternity, Peter spoke up somberly. "If I tell you where we can get some money, will you promise to get rid of the damn gun?"

"Where can we get money?"

"Saturday I was at Hoffmann's Tobacco Shop. I was trying to promote some cigarettes. Hoffmann's son, the fat one with the scar under his left ear that makes it look as if his face comes off at the end of the day, Laslo is his name, I think. He asked me to deliver a box of cigars to Fenner Street."

"We're going to become errand boys? It'll take us a lifetime to make enough for one schnapps."

They reached the Cafe Mosul and sat down at one of the sparkling white wrought-iron tables. At other tables, businessmen were savoring their continental breakfasts. Kurt dismissed the arriving waiter with a flourish. "We're waiting for two others. We'll order when they get here."

Peter continued, "He gave me two packages of Turkish for the delivery."

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"Any left?"

"Don't be a dreamer. Kurt, the thing is that I delivered the cigars to a beautiful house on Arnatt Street. It was a palace. Well, the old gent who owns the place was leaving for Salzburg Sunday."

"You devil! Your mind is as devious as mine."

"I don't want you to chance using a gun, that's why I came up with this plan."

"What about the servants?"

"He's opening his summer place. The servants will be with him."

"Peter, I apologize for ever having thought of you as an honest simpleton."

"There are gold ashtrays and silver all over the place. And small Luxembourg glass figurines. We won't take too much. That way, the old buzzard won't know things are missing. Promise me that we'll only take what we can put in our pockets."

"You have the word of a gentleman."

Impatiently, the waiter approached them again. The young men stood up. "We just remembered," Kurt said. "It was the Cafe Strauss. Although I personally prefer your coffee."

The young men hurried away.

Kurt licked his lips and looked skyward to thank the deity who cares for robbers. "This house was built to be robbed."

"Stop drooling and get that window open. I don't want to be here forever."

"I don't think this alley's been used for a hundred years. You saw, the trash is kept in back, the carriages in the other alley." Grimacing, teeth clenched, he continued to work the tall French window. The inside clasp finally gave way.

After they'd climbed in, both young men stood silently, awed by the opulence of the den. "Heaven, was I right?" Peter whispered.

"I've never seen anything like this. Never."

They went to work. Intent as they were on stuffing their pockets, both young men found it difficult to choose from the myriad items. Peter would reach out for a trinket, pull back his hand because another item seemed to be more attractive, and reaching out for the second, find a third more appealing. Similarly, Kurt had trouble amassing pieces. It was several minutes before his hand clasped its first treasure and deposited it in his avaricious pocket.

Checking some items on the huge Bavarian desk, Kurt whistled at a discovery. "Peter," he whispered, "do you know who owns this house?"

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"He's aCount, I remember that."

"He's the Deputy Minister of Justice."

"Oh, God!"

"I suggest we take five more pieces each and get out of here."

"Maybe we ought to put everything back. The Deputy Minister of Justice, what lousy luck!"

"We won't put anything back. If we're caught we're in trouble anyway. With or without our pockets full."

Kurt picked up a gold Queen Marie thaler mounted on a swivel base. It seemed to burn his fingers. Putting it down, he said, "You're right. We have enough."

Peter climbed out of the window first. Kurt scrambled out a second later. Kurt worked the window closed. As they turned to leave, a young man appeared, coming out of a small side door of the house next to the mansion. He was dressed in a painter's smock covered with smears of different colors of paint. In one hand he carried some wide-bristle brushes, in the other a can of turpentine. He was obviously preparing to clean the brushes. He looked at the other young men. His eyes fixed on them. It was as if his mind had taken a picture. Kurt and Peter looked at each other and somehow arrived at the notion of playing gay blades, two young men who had just come hurriedly from assignations. They laughed and strolled past the other young man.

Once on Arnatt Street, Peter breathed a sigh of relief. Kurt said, "Did you recognize him?"

"I was too busy praying."

"He knows us."

"From where?"

"School. He's an art student, too."

"You're hallucinating."

They started to walk faster, almost at a trot. "Peter, he'll turn us in. If there's a two-penny reward he'll turn us in. He's a weird guy."

"Would have spoken to us if he'd known us."

"He's a sneak. Peter, do you have any idea of what'll happen to us if he turns us in? We robbed a high official in the Justice Department. We'll die in jail. They'll kill us."

"So what do you want to do?"

"We have to kill him. I have the gun."

"Stop bringing up that gun all the time!"

"I can use it."

"You never killed anyone. Are you mad?"

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"He's just another poor useless artist. You saw the brushes, he's painting a house. Who'll miss him?"

Peter sat down on the curb. Two cigar butts were ground into the street. He stretched his legs beyond them. Kurt walked on, then turned back. Hovering over his friend, Kurt said, "I just need you to be a lookout."

"Are you seriously considering killing a man?"

"I don't plan to go to jail."

"Jail is better than killing someone!"

"Are you going to help me?"

"No! Look, let's think this whole matter over carefully. Let's take a few hours. He's just starting to work. We can come back if we decide to get rid of him."

"Peter, right now I can do it. In an hour I could weaken. I'd probably turn myself in to the police. Not me, Pete! Not me!"

He wheeled and walked back toward the alley.

The young man was still cleaning his brushes. The old paint, thinned by the solvent, was dripping down the small gutter that ran the length of the foundation of the house. Kurt checked Arnatt Street once more. Most of his body shielded by the mansion, he aimed. His finger, nestled in the trigger shield, started to clench the trigger. He was grateful that the young man didn't look up. The trigger started back.

Peter was still sitting at the curb when Kurt returned. "I didn't hear a shot," Peter said.

"I couldn't pull the damn trigger."

"Thank God."

"Let's see how much you'll thank God when we're in jail."

"I'll take jail."

"We almost got away with it. A quarter of an inch more and that weird Hitler would have been a dead man. Now Crazy Adolf with that stupid little moustache is going to turn us in. A quarter of an inch, my finger had to move a quarter of an inch, that's all."

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As in her previous story for EQMM, *"Games" (January 1992), Blanche Boshinski shows her penchant for the ironic twist, and her understanding of human psychology . . .*

SAWED TO DEATH

by BLANCHE BOSHINSKI

Ronald Kyle, Professor of English, couldn't think of Riley Smith as dead.

No, that wasn't true. The hollow gnawing in his midriff told him his colleague of almost thirty years was gone. How Riley died was what ate at the professor.

One-car accident. Speeding. Driving under the influence.

A Friday evening glass of wine with Marge, his wife, along with a few friends had been Riley's limit, these past ten years or so, anyway.

Who pushed Riley over the emotional brink? Ron thought of the perpetrator as a murderer once removed, someone outside the reach of the law. His gut churned with unfamiliar rage.

"I'll find out," he told himself. "I'll get back at the one who really killed Riley."

The professor stood, hands clenched together behind his thin back, staring out the narrow, third-floor window of his dinky office. He felt on the brink himself, and only the fourth week of spring quarter coming to an end.

This morning the tarred roof of the college maintenance building on the slope below held one more dead pigeon. Six now. Otherwise, the litter count remained at one pile of soggy newspapers, one broken crutch, and carry-out trash from the Hamburger Barn. A rotten view, not one to inspire the soul for the day of classes ahead.

"Ron, I've lost the key to the big cupboard."

The loud voice startled Ron. He turned abruptly. His heart gave that premature thump that scared him even though the doctor said not to worry.

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Brawny Nick Rossi stood in the doorway. As usual, he was dressed in scuffed jogging shoes, a knit sport shirt open at the neck and stretched to its limit over sinewy biceps. Not a good public image of a college professor, in Ron's estimation.

Ron struggled to bring his mental focus back from the trashed roof.

"Do you still have a key to that cupboard?" Nick was asking.

Ron shook his head and ran a hand through his thin grey hair as if to smooth out his thoughts.

"Sorry," he said.

"True or false, Ron," Nick went on, coming to the real reason for his visit. "Did old Riley have another woman, a side salad, so to speak?"

A strained moment passed.

"You're cruder than the kids, Nick," Ron finally answered.

His words squeezed through a tight jaw.

Nick held his hands in front of his face, palms out, in a playful display of defense.

"Right," he said as he backed into the noisy hall.

Ron kicked one of the stacks of books sitting on the floor around his desk. Shakespeare cascaded into Milton and Poe, slithered across the floor and sent Faulkner and Dana consorting with Clancy and Cussler. A stack of short-story anthologies still remained upright, and thinking again of Nick's remark, Ron gave it a boot, too. His class notebooks slid under the desk along with the books.

Ron grasped the edge of the desk and carefully lowered himself to his knees, trying not to aggravate his kinky back as he reached for the notebooks.

Generation gap wasn't the problem with Nick as it was with some of the other newly appointed faculty. Nick was hitting his mid-fifties, only three or four years younger than himself, but the two of them didn't speak the same language.

Ron loved the English language—its structure, idioms, literature—and knew good skills in its use could make or break a student later in life. That's what he tried to teach.

Nick, on the other hand, spoke computer—ROMS, bytes, COBOL. He came to Midwest via business, not the academic life. Ron wasn't against modern technology. It had its place. But its place wasn't in his big sunny office and adjoining classroom at the other end of the hall that had been turned into a computer lab this quarter.

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"I sometimes get down on my knees, too, but it's generally later in the day, after French III."

Ron raised his head to acknowledge Chancy Chabot's presence.

The saucy French teacher fled middle-age mindset with lavender eye shadow and rainbow-colored clothes. He never considered that she might not conform to the image of a college professor. As Ron looked up he had a view of tight red skirt over slim thighs.

He had heard, but never asked to confirm, that she had turned from Mildred Mayhill of Bismarck, N.D., into Chancy Chabot of Paris after living in Europe for a year.

Chancy hiked her skirt higher, folded up, and plopped onto the floor.

Ron maneuvered himself off his knees and sat beside her with his back against the desk. His long legs stretched out in front of him alongside Chancy's.

"It is Friday, isn't it?" he asked.

Chancy nodded and her dangling earrings played soft wind-chime songs. "How about spaghetti at Dino's before the student recital?" she said.

"Dang the compulsory attendance order for faculty at those musical tortures. Who's playing what?"

"Charlie Perez."

"The oboe! Saints preserve us!"

"You okay?"

That was Ron's cue. Since Riley's death six days before, Chancy had been there if he needed to talk.

"Only a couple of weeks ago at our usual Wednesday breakfast together, Riley said we should build a spaceship," Ron said.

"Dear old Riley couldn't build a doghouse."

Chancy began to stack the books strewn around her.

"He said if we slept in space every night we could stretch out our earth years and keep our virility until we were a hundred."

"Weird." Chancy blew dust off *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and put them on top of a stack.

"Not really," Ron said. "Time goes slower the farther you travel from earth."

"You didn't invite me to come," Chancy said to lighten his mood.

"We would have." Ron patted her knee. "But seriously, does that sound like a Riley who'd get drunk and smash himself up without a drastic reason?"

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"Had the doctor told him something dreadful? Did he need money?"

Ron shrugged. "Not that he told me. No clues in his office, either. When I cleaned it out, his personal belongings were gone."

"Your office looks like a stall at a flea market," Chancy said as she straightened a stack of books she had built. "When are you going to put up shelves?"

"As soon as I yank mine off Nick's walls and let him wade in a mire of computer printouts."

Chancy looked at her blue plastic wrist watch. "Time to beam light into the dark pit of ignorance," she said as she grabbed the edge of the desk and pulled herself up.

Ron scrambled to his feet but stiff knees made him too slow to give her a hand.

"A warning, professor," Chancy said as she looked back at Ron from the doorway. "Shawna Murdock is telling everyone she's absolutely, madly in love with you."

Beautiful, sultry Shawna, a student in the English I, II, III sequence, so, along with the other freshmen in the class, she had been his student all year.

Shawna was several years older than the other kids, but that gave her no right to be such an insolent, disagreeable brat as she had been until this term. The last week before spring break, Shawna had refused to answer a question, didn't acknowledge he'd asked her one.

She had sat in her seat, head down, dark hair falling loosely around her oval face, and, as usual, doodling in her notebook. Swirls, squares, and faces encircled and sometimes overlapped her written assignments.

That raw morning Ron had crawled out of bed with every bone aching, his sinuses ready to explode.

"Shawna Murdock," he had burst out during class at the peak of his drippy misery, "I'm sure you have a brain. Is there anything I can do or say to challenge you to use it?"

Shawna's gnawed pencil stopped, poised above her paper for a moment, then renewed its infernal scribbling.

Ron had sneezed and blown his nose.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I had no right to say that."

He turned his back on the class to write the assignment on the board behind his desk. As he finished, class ended.

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And now, a new Shawna, back from vacation, smiled at him if their eyes met. She nodded agreement to his most inane comments about a comma or a short story.

"Girls, girls, girls," Riley had told him when they first became friends, not long after Ron's arrival at Midwest. "They create the biggest problem for a young college professor."

Unlike Riley, whose teasing manner and curly black hair invited flirtations, Ron's big nose and gawky build didn't generate such goings on.

"They look good. They smell good. And they all want to fall in love with their professor," Riley had confided with a wink.

His young wife Marge accused Riley of allowing such problems to develop, and after a couple of his campus flings had warned him, "Once more and I'm out of here."

"I couldn't live without her," Riley told Ron.

The hall was growing quieter. Class time. Ron brushed the knees of his brown slacks and the sleeves of his sport jacket, then checked the knot of his tie.

As he entered his classroom just down the hall, Marlee was working furiously to finish her homework. Chang had a science fiction book open on his lap so he could keep reading during class. Doug stood at the back board adding to the list of old saws written there.

About half of Ron's sixteen students hadn't known the word "saw" as used to mean an old saying or adage. He had given the assignment the first day of the quarter.

"Pick a saw," he told them. "Test it in four or five live situations. Then, write it on the board, note how many tests it was given and whether you consider it TRUE in our modern world or if it should be KILLED."

He hoped that after this the kids would be aware of meaningless cliches.

"I can't decipher that, Doug," Ron said. He flipped the switches for the two banks of ceiling lights to brighten the small room.

"Three can keep a secret if two are dead," Doug said as he slouched back into his seat and picked at a pimple on his chin. "Four tries. TRUE."

"I hope your research wasn't fatal to anyone."

Doug had obviously found that in a book of quotations and not in campus conversation.

A couple of days before when Jake, the gangly Midwest shortstop, had written, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," everyone

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had laughed but Dori. Ron didn't keep up on campus romances, so he didn't know the story behind the loud-mouthed teenager and shy Dori. Jake claimed to have tested the saw five times and found it TRUE.

Marlee had written, "Brevity is the soul of wit."

Ron couldn't imagine sullen Marlee telling a humorous story short or long. She had marked her saw KILL.

Shawna sat in the second row directly in front of Ron's desk. She winked as he looked up. Ron hadn't had Riley's experience. He didn't know how to handle the situation.

Last week Shawna had written on the bottom of her paper, "You must make a lover angry if you wish him to love." Was that her saw for the assignment? He doubted it.

He had planned to begin reading *Beowulf* today and compare the Old English of the eighth-century poem with modern English. But when he picked up the book from the desk, he saw the blown-glass mermaid astride a dolphin that he had found in Riley's bottom drawer and brought to his classroom.

"I can't stay for class today," Ron said abruptly. "Read James Baldwin's story 'Sonny's Blues' and write a page about the relationship between the two brothers."

Ron couldn't wait any longer. He had to talk to Marge. After scribbling assignments on the board for his drama and advanced composition classes, he left the room almost at a run.

Generally he walked the mile from his apartment, but today, thinking of Riley, Ron had pushed his old Harley-Davidson out from the corner of the garage behind the classic white Malibu and ridden to work.

Those first twelve years at Midwest, while he and Lydia were married and Marge still tried to please Riley, the four of them rode all over the state weekends and summers. Their lives were a picnic of camping, hiking, and swimming at noon or midnight in forest lakes.

Ron rode slowly through the campus streets and into the surrounding residential area. He imagined Lydia behind him, her arms tightening around his waist at every turn and tilt.

After Lydia went back to Oregon, Marge and Riley had stayed his friends. That's why he couldn't understand Marge's behavior now. No call from her after Riley's smash-up, not even in answer to the messages he left on the answering machine. No service for him to

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attend and say goodbye. Only a notice from the college announcing a private cremation.

The For Sale sign in front of Riley's brick bi-level added another blow.

He rang the bell, not expecting an answer. There wasn't the slightest crack between the drawn white drapes. The big flowerpots that would have held geraniums by this time in the spring were gone. A pizza ad stuck in the grille of the storm door had an expiration date a week old.

Marge had been gone before Riley was killed!

Back of the house, only the picnic table remained to remind Ron of the happy times he had spent here eating barbecued chicken, playing volleyball, and arguing politics in the easy chairs on the patio.

One evening he and Lydia had made love in a hammock hanging there between the two maples after the mosquitoes had driven Riley and Marge into the house.

A great loneliness that couldn't be ignored as it could be when he was busy on campus, bowling, or directing Midwest's Little Theater, enveloped Ron.

Even though his students wouldn't expect him, stacks of compositions waited in his office to be corrected and graded, but first, Ron rode to the park and sat by the lake staring at the ducks and idling, watching two mothers swinging their preschoolers. He didn't regret not having children. His students were his heirs, but lately he didn't feel he was giving them anything.

He ate a hot dog while riding back to campus. In the empty classroom he saw that Dori had written, "Out of sight, out of mind. KILL (4)."

Ron sat at his desk in his office and reached for the top paper on the stack.

Chang had aliens solving Middle East problems. Jake's tale of baseball caught the excitement of a close game. Surprisingly, he'd even used good punctuation.

"Well done, kids," he thought. "You're catching on."

Shawna's paper turned up next. She'd written a rambling, disjointed episode of an ugly girl and a wounded soldier in some unclear place and time. As usual, doodles bordered the paper. He read her last line through a jumble of squares, letters, and stylized numbers.

"Dear Ron, Love makes the world go round."

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The smothering loneliness dropped over him again like a heavy net.

"Love makes the world go round." An invitation to turn on his world again. Did he dare accept?

The paper gave off the musky smell of Shawna's perfume. It trembled in his hands as he read the line again. His heart gave its excitable thump and he banged his clenched fists on the desk as he stood up.

It took two minutes for Ron to run down the stairs and be astride his bike.

Past Seaton Hall. On to the library. Around the girls' dorm. In front of Old Main he saw Shawna's flowered skirt and low-cut yellow peasant blouse. She sat on the lawn with her back against an oak. With head laid back, her smooth throat curved up to the warming sun.

"Shawna," Ron called as he idled the bike.

Dean Morris and the chaplain interrupted their conversation nearby and looked at him over their shoulders.

"Shawna," he called again. "Let's go!"

She hesitated, squinting into the sun, until she realized who had called.

"She's beautiful," Ron thought as he watched her run across the lawn to him, laughing and carrying her sandals.

"Put those on." He nodded to her shoes.

They took off the second Shawna settled behind him. Her arms tightened as they gained speed heading south out of town. Once in the hilly farm country, Ron couldn't go fast enough. He sought a wind to tear at his face and a roar in his ears to block out all else.

"Slow down, please," Shawna yelled, raising her head from where she had pressed it between his shoulder blades with cozy familiarity.

They sped up a hill, around a pickup. A car came at them over the crest. He cut back.

"Stop!" Shawna cried. "You're crazy!"

"Perhaps," he thought, keeping up their speed.

Ron made a right off the paved road and skidded onto a wooden bridge spanning a slough. Beyond, a dirt road wound among matted brush and trees for a quarter mile before turning sharply left. The bike slid to a stop at the steps of a white bungalow. Sloppy waves scuffed the lake shore fifty feet or so from the wide porch.

Shawna slid from the bike. "Do you want to kill us?"

"Like Riley was killed?"

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Ron grasped her wrist as he swung from the bike, ignoring a jab of knee pain, and began pulling her toward the house.

"I hate you." She tried to pull away.

Ron held on. He didn't know such fury lived in him.

The key. Still in the flower box. He banged the door open and forced Shawna through the living room and on into the bedroom at the back of the house.

"You stinking pervert." She spit the words at him as she pried at his fingers with her free hand.

"I thought you'd want to come here with me, Shawna," he said. "Like you came with Riley."

"He never told you that."

"You told me. Look."

He turned her so they both faced the wall across from the unmade bed.

"That collage of cattle brands Riley put together." Ron pointed to the large framed mat of letters and signs. "C over Bar, Reversed Double D over X, and all the others. You scribbled them on top of each other in your doodling, but today my eye sorted them out."

Unfamiliar anger had worn him out. He released his hold on Shawna and felt behind him for the edge of the bed. Slowly Ron eased himself down. He began to massage his temples, knowing his blood pressure had shot out of bounds.

Shawna was talking, low and controlled. "You shouldn't have embarrassed me in class. You wanted to challenge me. Well, you did. I've finished the assignment."

Her footsteps tromped through the house, crossed the porch, and disappeared into the sand. She would hitch a ride in a minute once she reached the road.

The sun tinted the quiet lake silky pink by the time Ron had washed the dirty dishes on the cupboard and buried the smelly garbage. Windows checked. Door tight. Key replaced. More memories to close off behind him.

A light shone from his classroom into the hall when he struggled up the last steps to the third floor.

Chancy closed the book she had been reading at the front desk when Ron walked in.

"I'm sorry, Chancy. Why didn't you leave?"

"Friends have the right to wait and worry," she said. "Shawna was here." Chancy nodded toward the back of the room.

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Shawna had told him her assignment was done. She had written her saw in large sprawling letters catty-corner across the remaining empty space on the board.

Chancy tapped her fingernails on the desk. "You didn't do anything foolish, did you?" she asked.

"I found the murderer once removed. It's Ronald Kyle." He pulled a chair up beside her and leaned heavily on his arms, which he folded and rested on the corner of the desk.

Chancy put her hand over one of his. "Tell me."

So he did, about his flareup at Shawna in class during the last quarter and the events of the afternoon just past.

Chancy listened and then said, "My saw for the day is 'No man is an island.' You know I gave you that miserable cold that ruined your disposition that day."

"You're saying we all touched Riley's life."

"But he killed himself, Ron. You know that."

Chancy squeezed his hand before she took hers away and grabbed up her big leather purse from the floor beside her chair.

"It's too late to eat and get to the recital on time," she said. "Let's play hooky."

As they left the room, Ron looked back at Shawna's saw once more before flipping off the lights.

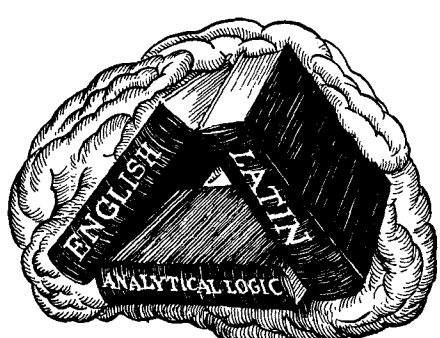
"There's no fool like an old fool. TRUE (3)."

"I wonder who's number three," he said.

"Nick, I suppose."

Ron smiled. "I haven't appreciated you enough, Chancy."

"Of course, you haven't," Chancy said as she slipped her hand under the crook of his arm.



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Jay Speyerer is a teacher of creative writing at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. This is not his first published story (two earlier pieces were published in small-press magazines), but it is his first mystery, and a debut so fine it will be a hard act to follow . . .

CLASS ACT

by JAY SPEYERER

Malcolm Dorn sat in his dirty green Maverick and listened to the rain hammer the roof. He lit his third cigarette, sucking the orange glow from the dashboard lighter. He sipped cold, fast-food coffee from a styrofoam cup. It tasted wretched and left a cottony coating on his tongue, but it was coffee.

He stared through the smoke and the windshield across the parking lot at the main gate of the Terminal Island Federal Correctional Institution. Seen through the streaming glass, the black bars were rain-warped and looked deceptively passable. But Dorn's research showed that these bars had held Michael Leonard Vosler for thirty-seven years.

Dorn checked his watch. Quarter to one. According to his information, Vosler was to have been released at noon on this first day of March. He was running his usual rosary of curses at bureaucracy and rainy Mondays when he noticed blurred activity at the gate. He turned the ignition key a notch, getting juice from the battery, and turned on the wipers.

Two figures stood at the open gate, a uniformed guard and a tall, thin man in a topcoat and snap-brim hat. Dorn watched as they faced each other for a moment and then shook hands in an abrupt up-and-down motion. Then the thin man bent and picked up a small gym bag, and moved slowly down the walk toward the street.

He seemed oblivious to the steady rain, not even looking up to inspect his freedom. He kept his eyes on the pavement six feet ahead until he reached the shelter of the bus stop. Dorn watched him sit down on the bench, placing his gym bag beside him.

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Dorn turned off the ignition and pocketed the keys. Then he took a final drag on his cigarette, opened the door, and got out, flipping the butt away. He raised the collar of his jean jacket and hunched his shoulders against the downpour as he hurried across the lot to the shelter.

The old man did not move as Dorn entered the shelter. He continued to lean forward on the bench, his forearms resting on his knees. His hat and topcoat were mottled dark in patches from the rain. From his high angle, Dorn could not see the other man's eyes, and so could not tell if he had received a glance of acknowledgment. Dorn took a deep breath, held it a beat, then let it out. Feeling his heart thudding, he spoke loudly enough to be heard over the drumming of the rain. "Mr. Vosler," he said.

The other man looked up, brown eyes hooded and wary. His face was pale and freckled, and the wrinkles seemed set in stone, immobile. A long moment, then, "Yeah?"

"I'm Malcolm Dorn."

Vosler remained unmoving at first, but then Dorn saw the awareness grow, a tectonic shift in the planes of his face, glacially slow but certain. His eyes still pinning Dorn, the old man's right hand moved to the brim of his hat and pushed it back off his forehead. Dorn followed the movement, unable to look away from the hand and the empty space where the little finger should have been. Finally Vosler spoke, his voice a sere whisper, molten anger bubbling below. "You malign the dead. I have nothing to say to you, scribbler."

"Every word I wrote was true."

Vosler turned his head away, looking down the street for the bus.

"It wasn't easy. In fact, it was the hardest story I ever wrote. Lane Broderick was my hero when I was little. I wanted to be a cowboy just like him when I grew up." Dorn stuck his hands in the pockets of his jeans. "I'm too young to have seen those cliffhangers in a theater, but I saw them on TV in the fifties. Saturday mornings. The Lone Ranger, the Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers. And the Phantom Rider."

Still looking away, Vosler said, "Fine way to treat a hero, scribbler."

"Mr. Vosler, I wrote that story because the only thing most people remember about that trial is that Vera Justine was going to have Lane Broderick's child. They've forgotten the unanswered questions."

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"Picked a rotten rag to publish it in," the old man muttered.

"The *Tattler* was last on my list, if that means anything."

"It doesn't."

Dorn stood with his hands in his pockets, feeling the rainwater drip from his hair and run down his neck. "I wanted to be a cowboy when I was six," he said. "When I was sixteen, I wanted to be a stuntman."

Vosler gave him a sideways look. "What would a sixteen-year-old know about stuntmen?"

"I knew that Yakima Canutt staged the chariot race in *Ben Hur*. Dave Sharpe did the stunts in *Captain Marvel*. Tom Steele, Jock Mahoney. They're all legends."

Dorn wiped water from his forehead. "I also knew that even legends have idols. That if Buddy Vosler walked away from a stunt because he thought it was too dangerous, no one else would touch it."

After several moments, the old man spoke. "We were friends, Brod an' me. Probably doesn't mean much these days, but it did then. We broke into the movies together. Walk-ons, bit parts. He gradually got bigger speaking parts and I fell into stunt work. Then Monolith hired us both in '38." He paused for a beat, then said, "That's where he met Vera."

Vosler looked up, the fierce glint still in his eyes. "Brod was a good man. Generous. He did charity work, USO shows, visited sick kids in hospitals. He was a class act."

"I wrote that, too."

Vosler grunted in grudging acknowledgement. "I suppose you did." He shook his head. "He stayed a class act till the day he died. He was always a pro, always knew his lines. Even reduced to taking bit parts on 'Fantasy Island' and 'Love Boat' and spots on 'Hollywood Squares.' "

"Fine way to treat a hero, huh, Mr. Vosler?"

Vosler gave him a long look, then nodded. "You ever see Brod's last ride? *Phantom Train?*"

"Many times."

"Real tricky gag, a horse-to-train transfer. He knew it was his last movie, the last serial Monolith was gonna make. He wanted to go out in style, so he did the stunt himself." He looked off again, down the street at the bus that was now approaching. "Didn't even want me on the set."

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Dorn leaned forward, trying to see the other man's face. "Shame you didn't do that stunt. Considering it happened at the same time Vera Justine was being killed."

The bus pulled up to the stop and the doors sighed open. Vosler stood and picked up his bag.

"Where are you going?" Dorn said. "I'll drive you."

The old man stepped over to the doors, then stopped and looked back. Dorn had to strain to hear him over the driving rain. "Let it go. Vera's dead and I did my time. Now Brod's dead and I just want to be left alone." He stepped onto the bus and glanced back at Dorn. "And I don't want anything from anyone, especially you."

Malcolm Dorn stared up at him. "Not even an alibi?"

The bus closed its doors and pulled away in a cloud of exhaust. Dorn dashed across the parking lot to his car. He fired up the engine, pulled out into traffic to a chorus of angry horns, and followed the bus. Of all the emotions Dorn had expected to see in Buddy Vosler's face, the last one he would have bet on was fear.

Following the bus into Long Beach was a no-brainer, so Dorn's mind filled again with the fragments of facts that made up Vera Justine's last day.

Lane Broderick's celebrated horse-to-train transfer was the final shot of *The Phantom Train*. Ten o'clock on a Tuesday morning in May, 1954. After reminding William Paige, the director, that he had practiced the stunt repeatedly, Broderick donned his black hat and mask, took the horse from the wrangler, and rode off out of sight behind a low hill.

After some last-minute camera adjustments and final instructions to the crew, Paige gave the start-up signal to the train engineer, who stayed hidden on the floor of the cab, giving the illusion that the train was a runaway. When the train reached a predetermined point, horse and rider emerged from their hiding place and gave chase. After leaping to the train and bringing it to a halt, the Phantom Rider remounted his horse and raced off out of sight behind another hill just as a posse of extras entered the scene.

The director yelled "cut," the extras dismounted, and everyone stood around congratulating each other on a perfect take for the final scene. A couple of minutes later, someone noticed that the star had not returned. One of the extras rode over and found Broderick's horse grazing at the top of a shallow ravine and a dazed Lane Broderick sitting at the bottom. The actor was covered with minor cuts and bruises, and, he said later, the bump behind his right ear where

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his head had hit the ground had rendered him unconscious for a few moments.

When the two men got back to the location, the first-aid man examined the star and suggested that a doctor take a look at him. As crew members were helping Broderick into a truck for the ride to the infirmary, word arrived of the murder of Vera Justine. According to the testimony of several who were there, Lane Broderick, upon hearing the news, immediately looked around and said, "Where's Vosler?"

The body of Monolith's star foreign import was found by the wardrobe mistress in her trailer two and three-tenths miles away where she was shooting another picture on location. The actress had broken her neck falling against a table. There were other signs of a struggle. And Buddy Vosler had cuts and bruises on his face and could not account for his whereabouts.

The headlines weren't as lurid as they could have been: SWISS FILM BEAUTY SLAIN. STUNTMAN CHARGED.

The rain had slacked off, so Dorn turned off his windshield wipers. On Ocean Boulevard, a few blocks past the Queen Mary, the bus let off two teenage boys and the old man. The boys hurried off down the street while Vosler stood there in the drizzle, looking around and trying to get his bearings.

Dorn pulled up to the curb, leaned across, and rolled down the passenger window. "Where are you going, Mr. Vosler?"

The man leaned down to look in the window. He stared at Dorn for half a dozen heartbeats, and then shrugged. "YMCA, I guess."

"Closest one's about six blocks away. I'll drive you."

A few more beats passed, then Vosler opened the door and eased himself into the seat. Dorn put the car in gear and merged with the line of traffic.

After several blocks of silence, Vosler shifted in his seat and said, "Taking a long time to go six blocks."

"We're taking a little side trip," Dorn said, keeping his eyes on the traffic.

The old man sat still, but Dorn heard the change in his breathing and the thinly disguised tension in his voice. "Where?"

"My place."

"What for?" Vosler said, turning his head to look at Dorn.

"Have some coffee. Talk." Dorn took his eyes from the road long enough to meet the other man's gaze. "Watch a movie." He returned his eyes to the street.

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Dorn felt the stuntman's stare for another half block until Vosler turned away and looked out his side window. They drove for another thirty minutes in silence, as the houses grew farther apart and the trees closer together. Just past Garden Grove, Dorn turned onto a side road, finally pulling in to the Sighing Palms Trailer Court. They parked, and Dorn watched Buddy Vosler as he peered warily out the window at the small blue motor home with the canvas awning over the door.

"You live here?"

"It's not much, but the rent's free."

"Why's that?"

"I manage the place for the owner. Collect the rent, make repairs, like that." Dorn opened his door. "Come on in. Mind the step."

Inside, Dorn draped their coats over the back of a kitchen chair and said, "Want coffee?"

Vosler nodded. His thin neck sprouted from the collar of a blue flannel shirt a size too large for him. The cuffs of his khaki trousers stopped an inch above round-toed black shoes. While Dorn busied himself with the coffee maker, the old man inspected the rest of the trailer. He glanced at the tiny writing area jammed with computer and reference books; the living room with the big-screen TV and VCR; the bedroom and bath.

From around the corner of the hall, Vosler said, "Use your bathroom?"

"Help yourself."

Dorn was setting two mugs of coffee on the scarred formica table when the other man came out of the bathroom.

"Like pissing in a phone booth," he said, sitting down at the table.

"Cream or sugar?"

Vosler shook his head. "Life's too short." He blew across the coffee to cool it. Nodding toward the living area, he said, "Don't believe I've ever seen a television bigger than a bathroom. You must do all right."

"It's rented by the week."

"Uh-huh." The old man sipped his coffee. Abruptly, he said, "What magazines you write for?"

"Tabloids mostly."

Vosler frowned. "That where I'm gonna show up?"

"No. I pitched the idea of an article about you to *Screen Years,* and they liked the idea enough to have me do it on spec."

Vosler looked up from his coffee. "How's that?"

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"No guarantee they'll buy it."

"That the usual way of doing things?"

"It is when you haven't made your bones with the big-paying markets." Dorn paused, then said, "So. Who starts?"

"You're the one dropped the bomb about an alibi." He sipped his coffee. "You must write fiction too, eh, scribbler?"

Dorn smiled. "Sometimes. How about I tell you a story, and you tell me if it would make a good movie of the week."

Vosler merely sipped his coffee, saying nothing.

Staring at the stump where the man's little finger should have been, Dorn said, "It has all the elements. Sex. Intrigue. Sacrifice. Unrequited love. Tear-jerker and nail-biter all in one package."

"Get to it," Vosler snapped.

Dorn leaned back, rocking his chair onto its back legs. "Okay, here it is. Straight-arrow cowboy actor and virginal Swiss musical star are having a secret, torrid affair. The studio doesn't like it, so they have his stuntman double for him in the public romance scenes. Nightclubs, movie premieres, like that. But they don't count on, or maybe don't care about, the stand-in falling for the leading lady.

"And what the studio and the stand-in don't know is that our cowboy hero has gotten fair lady in the family way. So he's feeling proprietary and protective and doesn't care for the attention the mother of his child is getting from the poor stuntman. Who incidentally has so many stars in his eyes he doesn't know which way the wind is blowing, pardon the mixed metaphor. So our cowboy makes our stuntman the fall guy. Literally."

Dorn lit a cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling. "Mid-morning. Final shot of the star's last cliffhanger. Not the last scene of the movie of course, since they shoot out of sequence. Anyway, train's ready to go, camera's in position. Our hero takes the horse and rides off out of sight to wait for the signal. But the stuntman's waiting there, and they switch places. And then . . . Something wrong?"

Vosler was leaning back in his chair, smiling and shaking his head. "Far-fetched. Too many people on a movie set to hide a switch like that. Could never happen."

Dorn nodded. "Mm-hm. I see." He drained the last of his coffee and set the mug on the table. Stubbing out his cigarette, he stood up and said, "How about we watch that movie now?"

The old man's smile faltered an instant, then he shrugged and got up. They moved to the living area and sat on the sofa.

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Dorn picked up the remote control from the end table and turned on the monitor and the VCR. "We're not going to watch the whole movie, just one scene. Tape's already cued up."

The monitor's screen blinked awake:

A clear sky canopies an endless prairie. The rolling terrain is broken in the middle distance by a knife edge of railroad track. Suddenly a train explodes into the frame, screen right. A churning gout of black smoke pours from the stack of the steam engine and streams straight back over the tender and the half-dozen passenger cars. The music reaches a crescendo. The camera follows the engine, keeping pace. The engine cab is empty.

Still abreast of the runaway train, the camera pans to the right, past the cars toward the caboose. The pounding music takes on a sinister tone as, at the crest of a hill behind the caboose, a horseman appears, dressed in black. After barely a moment, the Phantom Rider spurs his horse down the hill in pursuit of the speeding train.

Trailing a wake of dust, the horse leaps the tracks. Now on the same side of the engine as the camera, horse and rider seem as one, straining to pull abreast of the tender. The camera pulls in now, slightly, and the masked rider leans forward and reaches for the ladder at the rear of the coal car. His black-gloved right hand hovers there, fingers outstretched, a foot away from the ladder.

Then he leaps, and his right hand clasps the upright of the ladder. His left hand follows barely a second later, and in a flash he climbs to the top of the car. He crosses the rocky terrain, his boots seeking purchase on the lumps of coal as the car rocks from side to side. Finally, the black rider reaches the front of the car, crouches, grabs the rear of the engine cab's roof, and swings down into the cab. The background music slows as the train chuffs to a halt, the rising steam carried off by the wind.

The rider leaps from the cab to his waiting horse and speeds away from the camera, disappearing behind a hill just as a posse of riders enters the frame from the right.

"Amazing," Dorn said. "Now let's look at it more closely." He thumbed the remote, resulting in a reverse, high-speed replay. Then he froze the frame just as the rider was gripping the ladder of the coal car. "There."

Vosler leaned forward and squinted at the screen. His lips parted, and Dorn could hear his raspy breathing.

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Dorn hesitated, then spoke. "I must have run this scene a hundred times. Something about it kept bothering me, but I couldn't nail it down. Then one night I saw it. It's only on screen for two video frames, a fifteenth of a second. Look at the right hand. It's grainy and hard to see against the dark coal-car. See it?"

The old man stared at the frozen image from the past. The right hand in the black glove gripped the upright of the ladder, and, inches below it, the blurred left hand was moving up. But it did not quite obscure the right hand's little finger, extended and rigid.

"A fraction of a second faster with the left hand, and the right one would have been covered. No one would ever have known. That's your hand, Mr. Vosler, with a prosthesis in the glove. You did the stunt while Lane Broderick rode the two and three-tenths miles and killed Vera Justine." He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, looking at the old man. Vosler's eyes were still on the screen, but Dorn knew he was looking farther away. "Why, Buddy? Why have you been acting the part of a murderer for thirty-seven years?"

The old man sat back, seeming to sink into the sofa. With shaking hands, he dry-washed his face, then turned to Dorn. "Acting," he said. "Who was acting? I did kill her, sure as if I'd snapped her neck with my own hands."

Dorn's heart was thudding. He lit a cigarette just to give his hands something to do.

"When Brod and I set up the switch, all he told me was that he didn't want to do the stunt. But he didn't want to back out, on account of it had already been noised around the lot. So I agreed. Why not? I believed him." He shuddered a sigh. "I had no idea he was going to see Vera.

"He musta thought he was living a movie. He was going over to her trailer and sweep her up in his arms and elope. He'd shot the last scene of his movie, and running off with Vera would have set her picture behind schedule, but he didn't think of things like that." Vosler glanced at Dorn. "Brod was the one had stars in his eyes. Fairy-tale endings, that's what he always thought life should have. But, the way I figure it, when he got over there, she told him about the baby. And he snapped."

"That's what I don't get," Dorn said. "So what if she was pregnant? The public would have forgiven them. They forgave Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rosselini. Why not Vera Justine and Lane Broderick?"

"There's a lot you don't get, scribbler. Lane Broderick was sterile. That was my baby she was gonna have."

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After a stunned silence, Dorn's mind began sorting and sifting and questioning. "Why didn't the train engineer recognize you?"

"He wasn't in a good position to see me, and I was wearing a mask. Besides, he was expecting to see Lane Broderick, so that's who he saw."

"Where did the marks on your face come from?"

"Broderick. After I did the gag and rode behind the hill, I wondered where he'd gone off to. Then all of a sudden, he comes charging in and jumps me from his horse. We fall down the ravine and throw a few punches and we both get marked up some. Finally I pin him to the ground and he tells me what happened."

Vosler leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees, hands hanging limply. "I didn't know whether to kill him or cry like a baby. I suppose I was in shock. I only remember hightailing it out of there when we heard somebody coming."

"How could he have had time to ride all that distance and kill her? The scene only lasts four minutes."

"Thing you do most on a movie set is wait. Everybody does his job, just not at the same time. After Brod took his horse and rode off to wait for the train, they had to do something to the camera mount and the reflectors on the truck. Then there were last-minute instructions to the engineer. That took a good twenty minutes. Add that to the fifteen minutes after the stunt before they came to check on Brod." He stared at the floor and shook his head. When he spoke, his voice was a dry whisper. "Plenty of time."

"You let him frame you."

"No. He was my friend. I should have told him—about the baby, about Vera and me. Hell, it was an accident anyway. Way he told it, she was cussing and throwing things at him. That's how she was. He just defended himself too hard."

Dorn looked off into space, thinking. "And he let everyone believe it was his baby because he had an image of virility to maintain. Or because if the police found out the baby was yours, his motive for murder would have stuck out like a—well, it would have been irresistible." He lit another cigarette. "You're a piece of work, you know that? Doing time because you thought you deserved it. Why'd you let him off? What kind of friend was he to do that to you?"

"Wasn't his fault. What good would it have done, anyway? Just be one less hero for your generation." He pushed his hands against his knees, leaned forward, and stood up slowly. "Gonna write about this, scribbler?"

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"The last stunt of your career?" Dorn stood and faced Buddy Vosler. "I have to. I'm just sorry I found out all this too late to do you any good. Besides, I've written too much sleaze in my life. It's time I wrote about a real class act."

The old man gave him a long look, then shrugged and said, "Don't suppose I can stop you." After an awkward pause, he said, "Well, I really should get that room at the Y."

Dorn nodded. "I'll drive you."

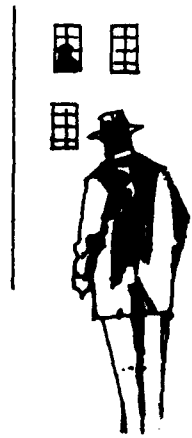
Buddy Vosler almost smiled. "We really going there this time?"

"Promise. Uh . . . We'll need to talk again. More details."

"Such as?" he asked, shrugging into his topcoat.

"Well, it's a small point, but . . ." He gestured to Vosler's right hand. "I was wondering how you lost your finger."

Buttoning his coat, Vosler said, "Happened when I was ten years old. I used to go down by the railroad tracks and watch the older boys hop the freights. One day they dared me to do it. First time I ever tried anything like that. Well, I didn't quite make it." He picked up his hat with his right hand and put it on. "Lost my grip and fell. Train ran over it."



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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICK IRELAN

The time spent behind Anamosa's sandstone walls wasn't a total loss. His cellmate told him everything he knew about how to make bombs . . .

TIMEKEEPER

by PATRICK IRELAN

He climbed over the fence at the edge of the quarry and crouched in the tall grass. Limestone outcrops glowed in the moonlight. Artie slipped through the shadows to the door of the shed.

The old wood splintered easily. Artie stepped inside and turned on his flashlight. It was amazing what you could get your hands on if you had the right attitude and a crowbar. Artie had both.

A week later, he locked up his run-down little house in Des Moines and drove to Omaha. He parked two blocks from Max's house and walked the rest of the way through the darkness. As he drew closer, he cut through a neighbor's yard and sneaked up to Max's back door.

Max was a person of regular habits—Max the brain, the organizer, the leader of men. He always went out on the back steps for a cigarette right after the ten o'clock news. His wife of twenty years was allergic to tobacco smoke, and Max was very considerate of others. Usually. Artie remembered an exception.

Artie paused in the darkness to get his bearings. It wasn't a big house. Max probably thought he'd fool the cops if he lived in a small place. But he didn't fool Artie.

Artie took his little present out from under his jacket. He set the time, wound the clock, and slowly pushed the whole bundle under the steps.

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At ten-thirty, Artie was sitting in a bar twenty miles away when Max walked out on his back steps, lit a Marlboro, and sucked the smoke into his lungs. It was a nice, quiet night. It would soon get noisy.

Ticktock, ticktock.

Six years prior to his death on the back steps, Max had told Artie that he was just the man he'd been looking for. "You're a good driver, you're smart, and you have a cool head. All you need is experience."

Max sounded a little too much like a recruiter for a cab company, but he was basically correct. Artie knew everything about cars—how to drive them and how to take care of them. He could outdrive anyone, but he never took unnecessary chances. He drove only as fast as he had to and always fastened his seat belt.

Max was also correct when he said that Artie needed experience. Artie was only eighteen, and reform school hadn't really prepared him for adult crime. With his small frame, youthful face, and innocent blue eyes, he even looked like a beginner.

They rehearsed the job at least ten times. Max repeated his instructions to Artie over and over: "Keep the motor running and wait for us no matter what." Max paced as he talked. He was tall and lean, and his shoulders stooped. "Wait even if you hear sirens or see the cops. We'll get back, and when we do, you've got to be there."

So Artie waited. Waiting was easy for him. He'd always had a lot of patience. He waited when the job took too long. He waited when he heard the sirens. He waited when he saw the first patrol car. He waited when an old man pointed him out to the police. He waited, in fact, until a cop aimed a .38-caliber revolver at him and said, "All right, asshole, get out of the car real slow."

They hauled him in, searched him, fingerprinted him, photographed him, questioned him, threatened him, pushed him around, and locked him in a cell. Throughout that day and all the days that followed, Artie kept his mouth shut. He didn't say a word about Max, Karl, or Sid.

Eventually, he found out through the convict grapevine what had happened to his three partners. He waited. They didn't. As soon as they heard the sirens, they ducked out the back, leaving him sitting in a stolen car on a street full of witnesses. They jumped a delivery man in the alley and drove his bread truck to where Artie had parked their second car. They got two hundred thousand dollars and a truck ride. He got five years and a nosy parole officer.

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The time he spent behind Anamosa's sandstone walls wasn't a total loss. His cellmate told him everything he knew about how to make time bombs. It didn't take much: dynamite, blasting caps, wire, a clock, a dry-cell battery. It was dangerous but not difficult: Snip, snip. Twist, twist. And the finished product was easy to operate: Set the time. Wind the clock.

Good night.

Of course, he didn't actually make bombs at Anamosa. The guards restricted his access to materials. But he learned *how* to make them. That was the important thing. He'd practice later. For the present, he had plenty of time to think about the three men who had deserted him, his obsession growing stronger each year.

The day he got out of prison, he called Max to ask for his share of the take. "Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers," Max said. "The banks always use attempted robberies to cover their own theft. We didn't have time to collect anything." As he listened, Artie imagined Max staring at him with his dark-blue eyes, eyes that could see through almost any problem a professional criminal would ever have. "But I can spare a couple of hundred to help you get back on your feet. We tried to get back to you, Artie, but the cops had already grabbed you. There was nothing we could do."

Sure, thought Artie. Nothing you could do. But there was something *he* could do. He waited a year, convinced his parole officer he was being a good boy, and got out his crowbar.

After finishing with Max, Artie turned his attention to Karl. Karl with the big hands and the small brain. Artie's first task was to find him. It was hard to decide where to look because his movements were so illogical.

Karl was not a good learner, but Max had managed to teach him one thing, how to clean out a cash drawer with a single grab. Karl could go down a row of teller cages like a vacuum cleaner. If anyone got in his way, he just knocked him aside without missing a drawer.

"Just do what Max says," Karl had told Artie. "Max, he's real smart. We'll make lots of money."

"I hope so," Artie had said.

"Don't worry about anything. Max figures everything out real good. He tells us just what to do. It always works out just like he says."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Sure, he's real smart."

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That was six years ago. Now Artie wanted to repay Karl for his generous advice. All he had to do was find him.

Karl stayed with his mother. Artie remembered that. But no one in the old neighborhood in Des Moines could tell Artie where he and his mother now lived.

A few weeks after he started looking for Karl, Artie ran into an old reform-school friend who gave him an address in Rock Island, Illinois, one hundred seventy miles east. But when he drove over the next day, he saw that a young couple with a baby was living in the house. He looked up Mrs. Vernon's name in the phone book and drove to the new address, which turned out to be at an apartment building.

Artie went in for a look and saw from the stack of bills in the mailbox that Karl and his mom were not around. "They're on vacation," said another man who lived in the building. "Went to Disneyland. They'll be back in two weeks."

Disneyland, thought Artie. It figures. When you get home, Karl, I'll send you right back to Disneyland.

But when he drove back two and a half weeks later, the same man had new information. "They moved out the day after they got back," he said. "They stopped in Las Vegas on the way home and had to find a cheaper place."

Artie took the Centennial Bridge across the Mississippi to Davenport. A towboat was pushing twelve barges full of Appalachian coal toward a power plant upriver. At the ballpark beside the west approach to the bridge, the Quad City Angels were taking batting practice.

Artie soon found the address the man had given him. Karl and his mother had moved into an old rooming house across the street from an abandoned grade school. Artie tried the front door and found that the lock did not work. Inside, he counted three doors on the first floor and three on the second. A piece of paper tacked to one of the doors on the second floor displayed the name "Vernon." A stand table in the hallway held a communal telephone. Artie wrote down the number.

He went back to his car and watched the house all afternoon. He didn't mind waiting. At five o'clock, Karl came out the door and walked away. A little after five, people began arriving at the house, including Karl's mother. At five-thirty, Karl returned with a container of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

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Artie watched the house for the rest of the week. Everyone but Karl apparently went to work each morning, Monday through Friday. Karl ventured out every now and then in search of fast food.

Artie returned the next Monday and watched everyone leave for work, everyone but Karl. At eight-thirty, Artie crossed the street and quietly climbed the stairs to the second floor. He set and wound the clock, put the bundle on the floor under the phone, and walked out.

He started his car and drove six blocks to a corner where he'd tested all three pay phones early that morning. At 8:48 he walked up to one of the phones. At 8:49 he took some coins from his pocket. At 8:50 he put the coins in the slot and dialed the number.

Ring, ring. Ring, ring.

Ticktock, ticktock.

That left only Sid. Sid the wise guy, the lady's man. Sid with the curly hair and good looks. "Sure," he'd told Artie. "Get yourself a chauffeur's license and drive for Max. Short hours, good pay, early retirement." As usual, he laughed at his own joke.

Sid was an expert with all kinds of weapons. The day Artie drove his partners to the bank, Sid said, "Don't worry if you hear a shot. I like to scare the pigeons out."

Now, sitting in his car on University Avenue in Des Moines, Artie remembered Sid's pigeon joke. Very funny, he thought as he watched Sid walking into a bar with a tall, slender blonde. He could've had his own blondes—lots of them—during those five years in prison. Sid had helped deprive him of that, and now he was going to deprive Sid of everything.

Artie knew it wouldn't be easy. Sid wasn't stupid like Karl. He would've heard about the other two by now and would be on his guard. But Artie wasn't in a hurry. He could wait for the right moment. He had all the time in the world.

After about an hour, Sid and his blonde friend came out of the bar and into a taxi. Sid rarely drove. He drank too much and didn't want to get arrested for drunk driving. "I don't want to get my name in the papers," he'd told Artie. "People might think I'm irresponsible."

Artie followed the cab to a restaurant on Grand Avenue. After two hours in the restaurant, Sid and the blonde took another cab to an expensive apartment building in West Des Moines. They didn't come out again that night.

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This was the kind of pattern Artie had observed all week—no pattern at all. Sid didn't go to work. He didn't need to. When he ran out of money, he just bought a new ski mask. He lived in two apartments and moved from one to the other in no particular fashion. Even his girlfriends were no help in predicting his movements. One blonde led to another. An accurate scorecard was not possible.

"I don't like to do the same old thing day after day," Sid had once told Artie. "I wouldn't take a nine-to-five job for anything. I'd rather be dead." Artie would be happy to oblige.

Finally, Artie noticed something that showed promise. Once a month Sid visited his parents in the east-side neighborhood where he, Karl, and Artie had grown up. A neighborhood of small houses and the smell of bacon grease. On hot nights, Sid slept in a screened porch at the back of the house. The porch overlooked a green yard spotted with lawn ornaments. In the dim light of evening, it looked like a graveyard.

The next time Sid took a cab to his parents' house, Artie was ready. He waited until midnight, parked a block away, and walked through the darkness, past the old car in the driveway and back to the screened porch. He could hear Sid snoring.

Artie set his package on a narrow ledge, just a few feet from Sid's handsome face. Thirty minutes later, he was sitting in his favorite restaurant, an all-night diner on the opposite side of town. So long, Sid, he was thinking. The joke's on you.

Snore, snore. Snore, snore.

Ticktock, ticktock.

The food at the diner was good that night. It always was. As usual, Artie had a leisurely meal. His mother had taught him not to eat too fast. It was bad for your health. After a tenderloin and French fries, he had a piece of apple pie à la mode and a cup of coffee. He flirted with the waitress for a while, then had another piece of pie and another cup of coffee.

He read the sports section of the *Des Moines Register* for ten or fifteen minutes. The Cubs were losing again. Artie folded the paper and stood up. He left a big tip for the waitress, waved at the cook, and paid the tab. Then he walked out the door and stopped on the sidewalk.

Artie surveyed the old diner's metal exterior. He loved this place. He always went there after big events like the one tonight. Now that he'd taken care of Sid, he felt pretty satisfied with himself.

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He climbed into his car, closed the door, and fastened his seat belt. Glancing out the window, he saw something that paralyzed every muscle in his body—the ghost of Sid Carlson walking off across the street. Artie shook himself loose. He didn't believe in ghosts. It was obviously someone who just looked like Sid.

The look-alike stopped beside a rusty car parked under a streetlight, then turned and looked back at Artie. He waved and grinned. Artie stared. It wasn't a ghost. It wasn't a look-alike. Sid got into his parents' car and drove away.

Artie sat there with his mouth open, then suddenly reached for the door handle. It wasn't there. He looked across at the other door, but its handle was missing, too, as were the handles for both windows.

For the first time in six years, Artie found himself in a hurry, a big hurry. He clawed at the hole where the door handle had been, in hopes of opening the latch. When this failed, he pushed the horn to attract someone's attention, but the horn wouldn't work.

He saw that he'd have to kick out one of the windows, but when he reached down to unfasten his seat belt, the buckle refused to give. "No, Jesus, no!" he screamed as he fumbled with the buckle.

He gave up on the buckle and began pulling clumsily at the shoulder harness. His heart was racing. After what seemed like an hour, he managed to slip the harness over his head. This loosened the lap belt, and he squirmed until he got his legs out.

Free of the belt, he fell back in the seat and began kicking the window in the opposite door with his heel. Sweat ran down his face and neck. His breath came in gasps.

The safety glass resisted his kicks, but Artie finally punched out a hole about the size of an orange. He stuck his right arm through, cutting his hand and wrist. He pulled the handle, and the latch released. He drew his hand back in, gashing it even worse, then pushed the door.

Cool night air rushed in as the door swung open. There was still time. He could still make it. He started to crawl out, but his foot caught between the gear shift and one of the bucket seats. He backed up and pulled free. Just a few more seconds, he thought. Please.

He scrambled forward and fell out the door. He rolled over, got up, stumbled, got up again, and began to run. He ran to the end of the block, jumped behind a pickup, and waited for the detonation.

Nothing happened. He waited. Still nothing.

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He waited awhile longer, then peeked over the hood of the truck. Sid Carlson drove up to Artie's car and got out, laughing like a crazy man. He walked over, closed the door that Artie had struggled so hard to open, went back to the rusty Ford, and drove away.

Artie bent over and threw up on the street.

Three hours later, Artie unlocked the front door of his house with his left hand and walked slowly inside. He went straight into the bathroom and took one of the painkillers the doctor had given him. He kept his bandaged hand elevated.

After taking the pill, he looked at his reflection in the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot and his hair was disheveled. His shirt was covered with blood.

Artie felt like a fool. He realized now that Sid had spotted him weeks ago, had known all along what to expect, and had only pretended to be asleep earlier that night. But Artie swore to himself that the next time would be different. He'd get even if it took forever.

Artie suddenly felt very sleepy. He started to walk out of the bathroom, then turned and went back. He picked up the bottle of painkillers and opened the door to the medicine cabinet.

The explosion stopped every clock in the house.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

FAME AT LAST

by BOB ZIEGLER

Said a starving young painter named Stang
As he silenced a critic, bang, bang!
"Though my art is a mess,
I'm assured of success.
For I know I am certain to hang!"

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a *NEW* short story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

During the seventies and early eighties, Lawrence Treat contributed a number of memorable stories to EQMM, *several in the genre he is credited with inventing, the police procedural. The author of eighteen novels and many short stories, Mr. Treat has won three Edgar Awards and is a past president of the Mystery Writers of America.*

We welcome back an old friend of the magazine with this story of a murder served up in the bowels of Hell's Kitchen . . .

INCIDENT IN HELL'S KITCHEN

by LAWRENCE TREAT

It was my first case where a man's life was at stake, and it took the jury ten minutes to decide. Just ten. And there are reasons why it's all best forgotten.

I was only a year out of law school and still living at home in New York. My father had a good practice, mostly corporate law and trusts, but I wanted none of that. I wanted trial work in the criminal field, but because my father had a much publicized feud with the reigning D.A., I chose not to do the obvious and apply for a job in the prosecutor's office.

There was no Public Defender in those days, so I rented an office, hired a part-time secretary, and hung up my shingle. My father handed me a spin-off or two, barely enough to pay my rent, and I waited for something to happen. I waited for the big case, someone unjustly accused of a crime they hadn't committed, maybe a beautiful girl unjustly charged with murder. The scenario varied, but my

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client was always beautiful and we always fell in love and got married.

Naturally, it didn't happen that way. Instead of a girl, it was a sallow young man with tired, baleful eyes who clerked in a brokerage office. He was newly married and lived in Weehawken and took the 42nd Street ferry at six every evening and then a bus to his young bride, who was just learning to cook and not much good at it. Still, when he mentioned her name, he glowed.

His name was Richard Demming and you've seen him a hundred times. He's the guy you never notice, the guy ahead of you in a ticket line, the guy who sat across from you at that sandwich place. And even if you did notice him, he didn't register—unless he talked about her. Emma. Then his eyes shone and his whole face lit up, and his strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure.

I'm not sure how he got hold of my name. I think he knew somebody who was a friend of mine. Or maybe he got me mixed up with my father. At any rate, here I was talking to him in that small, bare-walled room in the old Tombs Prison and I was listening to a story that left me with substantial doubts.

"I was dead tired," he said. He spoke wearily and I sensed that he had no hope, no confidence in me. He was repeating the lines that somebody had taught him to say, but there was no conviction in his nasal, monotonous voice. "I usually take the six o'clock ferry, but I'd worked late that day. I have a wife and we're going to have a baby and I need money. I'll need a better job, but right now it's all I can do to keep what I have, so I work extra hours. Do you see?"

I didn't see. To my mind, Richard Demming would work hard all his life and in a few years he'd be ready for a raise, but only because of his seniority, because he'd done the same thing for so long that they could rely on him. So I didn't see, and I waited for him to stop talking about himself and get to the point.

"That's why I work late, so maybe they'll notice me and give me a raise, and now—" He shrugged, as if it didn't really matter, he didn't believe that anything would happen. He'd given up and expected me to give up, and why did he even bother telling me?

"And now," I said firmly, "it's a class A felony. Murder. So tell me about it."

"There's not much to tell," he said. "I worked until almost eight and the ferries are slow at that time in the evening, and on that particular night there was some kind of delay, there wouldn't be

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another ferry for more than an hour and—I guess you know the area."

I did. Hell's Kitchen they used to call it. Tenth to Twelfth Avenue in the forties, one of the toughest areas in the whole city. Near the ferry, it was a district of shoddy brick buildings and seedy warehouses with iron gratings in front of broken windows. There were plenty of bars. You'd find a couple of broken-down bums stretched out on the sidewalk, maybe some kid running away after he'd smashed a street light or committed some minor misdemeanor, even rolled a drunk to grab a few dollars or a watch. A lone woman would probably be standing on a street corner, but most of them were in the bars, hoping to pick up a customer. At night, the streets looked deserted, but even the cops stayed near the lights.

Demming didn't have the sense to realize the dangers. He left the ferry house and started out as if he were taking a stroll on a country lane.

"I was tired and hungry and decided I needed a drink," he said, "so I went into the nearest bar. The Shamrock, it's called."

I could see him go in. A drab, uncertain figure walking through those slatted swinging doors. Once inside, he wished he'd waited in the ferry house. He didn't belong here, didn't know the lingo, didn't know how to order a drink, and couldn't make up his mind what he wanted until the bartender shoved one at him. He was scared to face anybody, scared to leave, and when he saw the door to the back room, he took his drink with him and went in.

"The room was empty," he said, "so I sat down in the only decent chair, made myself comfortable, and started out on my beer. After a little while I guess I fell asleep. I don't know what happened after that, I'm not even sure now. All I can tell you is I woke up when something pushed up against my ankle.

"I can't get it out of my mind. Waking up and seeing all that blood, and a man lying there and leaning against my feet, and that green knife in his chest. All the way in, just the hilt sticking up. And all that blood."

Not much you can do about it, I told myself. Find out whatever you can from the Shamrock. Ask who'd been there that night, get the police on the case, and hope. That was all I'd be able to manage.

Demming's voice, droning on, was feeble. I couldn't expect much help from him, I myself only half believed him. I'd collect a few shreds of evidence and make sure to keep him off the stand, because if he ever testified, whoever handled the case in the D.A.'s office

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would make mincemeat out of him and serve him up, ready-made for the jury.

"That knife," Demming went on. "It was a green kitchen-knife like the one I'd bought for Emma a couple of days ago and forgotten to give her. I remember telling the clerk it would make a good murder weapon. I remember we laughed over it, and seeing it there now—I don't know, it fascinated me, I had to touch it, just to make sure everything was real."

Sure, I told myself. First you made sure the knife could be traced, and then you went and touched it so that you left nice, clean fingerprints.

"When I got over the shock," he said, "I realized I'd better not get caught there. That was when I noticed the back door, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I could go out that way and nobody could ever trace me. They didn't know me there, didn't know my name or who I was or where I lived, and all I had to do was walk out the back door and then on down to the ferry. It might even be there, waiting."

"Then what?" I asked.

"I got up and tried the door, but it was locked. I couldn't move it because it had some kind of dead bolt that needed a key. I guess the hardest thing I ever did in my life was to walk out of the room and out through the front door. Still, once I got outside I was clear of it, nobody would know. I'd get on the ferry and sit down and rest.

"It seemed so simple. Just walk out. Except that I forgot one thing. I forgot to pay my tab, and as soon as I got to the door and started to make a break for it, they were after me, the bartender and one of the customers. And there I was running and they were yelling out to stop me, and who stopped me? A cop!"

Naturally, I thought. But I merely said, "And that's all?"

He was too depressed to answer. He nodded and turned to me with the sad eyes of a whipped puppy. *That's all.* It came out in a kind of whisper.

I made the obvious remarks. I believed in him, I'd do all I could. What was the name of the bar? The Shamrock? I'd go there, maybe somebody would remember some detail that Demming hadn't noticed, maybe the bartender had killed this man. What was his name?

"They said he was called The Knife."

"Like Mack the Knife?"

It was a stupid thing to say. Demming hadn't seen or read *The Three Penny Opera*, and even if he had, my remark wouldn't have been funny. Nevertheless, it got his mind off things and made him

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think that somehow or other I was going to get him out of this mess.

I did my best, of course. The next day I went to the Shamrock, ordered a beer, and made small talk with the bartender. He was a big, wide-shouldered Irishman who spoke with a brogue and let me know that if I didn't have the Gaelic I didn't belong here. I ought to be sopping up a spoonful of milk over on the East Side, where there were plenty of Englishmen to yack with.

After a while I asked my question. "About that murder here last week," I said.

"And what murder is it you're talking about?"

"Don't give me that," I said. "Demming. I'm his lawyer, my name's Spencer Hill and I'd like to hear what happened."

"So you're a law man and you want me to give you the time of day. And what would Your Honor like me to say?"

"I'll be satisfied with the plain ordinary truth."

"And what would that be?"

"Let's start with this man who was killed," I said. "They called him The Knife, didn't they?"

The bartender looked past me at a trio who were at a corner table lapping up the first one of the day. "This fine man, he's asking what is it we know about The Knife," he said.

The trio played it as if they'd been rehearsed. "That S.O.B.," two of them muttered.

I walked over to their table. "Apparently you knew him. Mind if I sit down?"

The freckle-faced man with a mop of hair that was the color and texture of brick answered. "Sure and you can sit down if you're asked to," he said, "and then you'd be welcome. But what if nobody asked ye?"

I remained standing. "As you probably just heard, I'm Richard Demming's lawyer."

The three of them studied me as if I'd just dropped off from the moon, but Freckle-Face answered. "Ye don't look it," he said.

"Stop horsing around," I said angrily. "My client did no killing and you know it. Have you no compassion? Because I'm not accusing you or anybody else and I don't want to make any trouble. I just want facts."

"Compassion," Freckle-Face said. "A fine haughty word. And where did ye learn such fine language?"

He was making fun of me, but I kept at him. "I hear it's a word they respect back in the old country," I said. "So how about answer-

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ing my question? For instance, were you here when it happened?"

"The three of us was having supper with our lovely wives, and I'd better tell you, the only facts you'll get here is he's dead. Dead, and good riddance."

"Thanks," I said. "Nice meeting you," and I went out.

I had better luck at the next bar. I found out that The Knife's name was Jack O'Toole and the only thing that surprised people was that he hadn't been killed long ago. He had a twisted mouth and a twisted mind, and he'd been a grievance to his mother ever since he'd first tasted of her milk, and whoever had killed him ought to get a medal.

"And you're pinning the medal on my client?" I said.

"Walk in anywhere around here and say you killed Jack O'Toole, and the drinks will be on the house."

All of which was interesting, but didn't help the case of Richard C. Demming.

I spoke to Vince Assisi, the Assistant D.A. who was handling the prosecution. He was a grey-haired man with sunken cheekbones and not much flesh underneath. He'd gone through the wars; he'd won and lost more cases than he cared to remember, and he offered a reduced charge of manslaughter with a recommendation of leniency if I'd take a plea of guilty.

I thought it was the best I could get, but Demming wouldn't hear of it. He said it would kill his bride, she'd never be able to hold up her head and look anyone straight in the eye if he gave up the fight before it even started. And as he spoke, the sag went out of his shoulders and the fierce light of battle swept across his eyes for a moment, but for a moment only. It left me wondering how a man could change his whole being in the space of a single second.

This Emma of his—I decided I'd like to meet her, and I'd certainly want her sitting near me at the counsel table, where Demming could look at her and feel her presence. But when I met her, a pale, undernourished little thing with quiet, grey eyes, I almost gave up.

Nevertheless, I sensed something else in her, some hidden chord that, touched, could enable her to impress her will on stronger people than herself. But whether she could inspire the same will in her husband was doubtful. And even assuming that she could, how would that help a budding young lawyer win his first big case?

About nine in the evening on the night before the trial, after the jury had been picked and everything was set to go, I was working on my strategy and wondering how to counter the main points that

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the prosecution would make. I was putting notes on a pad of paper when the phone rang. I picked it up and a gravelly voice said, "Spencer Hill—I'd like to be having a word with him."

"I'm Hill," I said.

"Be you the man on the Demming case?"

"That's right. Anything I can do for you?"

"You can meet me at that lumberyard on Twelfth, if you're wanting to know who did it."

"You know?" I asked. He didn't answer and I said, "All right, I'll be there. Just tell me when."

"Now," he said, and hung up.

I held the receiver in my hand and kept the line open for maybe a minute.

I didn't believe this voice. Why would anybody call me on the night before the trial? Why now, when I probably couldn't do much with the information, not this late in the proceedings?

I wondered whether this was some kind of trap, but I could think of no reason for one, so—

Now, he'd said. Ten at night.

I took a cab to the lumberyard and told the cabby to wait.

"Not me," he said. "Think I want my throat cut?"

I shrugged, gave him a dollar, and walked into the yard. To my surprise, the big gate swung open at my push. The man with the gravelly voice had prepared for me, I had that much consolation.

As soon as I stepped into the first aisle between the stacks of lumber, I sensed I was in for trouble. I could barely see my way. What was underfoot, what made the ground so soft and spongy, I didn't know. I stumbled once, banged into that wall of wood, and kept on walking because I had no choice. I didn't even have the comfort of a rift of light ahead of me. I was walking into nowhere, with nobody except myself and a total, meaningless darkness.

I walked gingerly, careful of every step. I heard a rat scurry off, and something brushed against my trousers. Off in the distance the long, mournful horn of a tugboat sounded, and I seemed to hear the shriek of a gull, but gulls don't go flying in the middle of the night.

The hand on my shoulder made me spin around. I could see a shape, a broad, formless body and a cap pulled down over a face that I could barely distinguish.

"So you came," the gravelly voice I'd heard over the phone said. "I didn't think you'd have the guts to show up."

"Why not? You said you'd tell me who killed O'Toole. Well, who?"

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"I did it."

I drew in my breath.

Him. Here he was. The killer. But why bring me here? What did he want out of me?

"You—you're willing to stand up in court and admit it?"

"You're out of your mind. You open your trap about this, you blab it to anybody, and you're a dead man."

My voice trembled and came out in a squeak. "Tell me about it," I said.

"You been asking a lot of questions and you know what kind of a rat O'Toole was. He was due to get it, and I obliged. It was this kid's bad luck to get mixed up in it. No fault of mine. I do a lot of business in the neighborhood, I got connections and I got friends, and practically every one of them with a bar decides he ought to give me a key to the back door of his place, so I told O'Toole to meet me at the Shamrock, I had something to talk about. I said we'd have a drink in the back room where it was private, so he was there when I walked in. And this kid, he was parked there, looked sound asleep or maybe drunk. Anyhow, he was dead to the world.

"There was a lot of things me and O'Toole had to talk about, but he didn't expect me to come through that back door, and when I did, he knew what was coming. He was dead already. Too scared to move. He didn't even budge when I put the knife in him. Looked like he was waiting for me to leave, and he was just starting to topple over as I closed the door. And the kid? Still sitting in that chair. Heard nothing, saw nothing. So I locked the door and walked off, and maybe I'll meet O'Toole down in hell, or maybe the Good Lord will see it my way and let me in through the gates."

"But why tell me?"

"Because 'twould be on my conscience if you didn't know the poor man was innocent. And God rest his soul."

"Then come into court and say your piece, and Richard Demming will be a free man."

"Are you crazy? What I did was for the peace and salvation of every man, woman, and child that ever laid eyes on The Knife."

"But what good is that to my client? And at least tell me your name."

His big hand grabbed me by the shoulder and he shook me like I was a dirty towel. "Open that big mouth of yours, open it to anybody any time—get it?"

"Yes," I said meekly. "I get it."

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That was all. I got home without any trouble, but I had a bad night. Despite what I'd learnt, or maybe because of it, I knew that Demming didn't have a chance. If I breathed a word to anybody about what I'd been told in the lumberyard, all that would happen would be another murder, and the victim—me.

For a while I couldn't get to sleep. I knew who'd killed Jack O'Toole, I'd spoken to the perpetrator and he'd admitted his guilt, and I was helpless. For the rest of my life I'd see a pathetic little man languishing in jail, or else I'd remember how he'd been executed for a crime he'd never committed. And it was my responsibility.

I thought of my lovely, romantic dream of defending a beautiful girl accused of murder, and I asked myself how I'd have rescued her, what brilliant strategem I could have used, and suddenly I had a wild, crazy idea. It made no sense, but I felt as if I was on the crest of an enormous wave and it bore me up with the exhilaration of a great, inspired moment, and with that idea I finally went to sleep and slept soundly for the rest of the night. If. If the idea worked. But would it? Could it?

I saw Demming in the morning and told him my plan and told him what to say. He said he'd try, but I doubted whether he was capable of it. I argued with him, told him to write the words down on a piece of paper and to memorize it and then burn the paper, after which I went to my office. I wasn't due in court until noon, I still had a few chores ahead of me, and one of them was getting Emma on the phone and telling her.

She demurred at first. "But I know Richard so well, I don't think he can do it."

"He can," I said, "and you'll make him. See him a few minutes before court opens. Just look at him."

"I'll try," she said, and that was all I could get out of her. She'd try!

In court that afternoon I listened to Barker's opening statement. It was matter-of-fact. He outlined the case and told the jury what he expected to show. He did a workmanlike job and he concluded by asking for a verdict of murder.

I waived my opening statement and waited for Barker to present his case, and it was devastating. The bartender and a couple of patrons swore that only two people had gone into the back room, first Demming, and about fifteen minutes later, O'Toole. When Demming had come out, he'd looked shaky. Under a severe strain. He didn't even hear the bartender asking him to pay. He staggered, but man-

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aged to walk to the exit. Once outside, he made a dash for the ferry house without paying for his beer. A police officer stated he'd seen Demming running, had stopped him and brought him back to the Shamrock, where O'Toole's body had just been found in the back room. It was locked and could not be opened or closed without a key.

After identifying the knife as similar to the one that Demming had purchased, a police expert testified that Demming's fingerprints had been found on the murder weapon.

My cross-examination was brief and made little impression. I showed that Demming had never been in the bar before, had no known connection with O'Toole, had had a good reputation. I made no claim that anyone other than Demming and O'Toole had been or could have been in the locked room. Then I put Richard Demming on the stand in his own defense.

In a nervous voice so low that the judge had to keep asking him to speak louder, Demming admitted he'd been alone in the room when O'Toole had come in.

"He was drunk," Demming said. He had to catch his breath before continuing. "From the moment he came in, I knew he was a bully. He called me yellow and a chicken-livered ninny and he didn't like my face. He kept saying things like that, and I wanted to get away, but he blocked the doorway. I didn't know what to do. The way he looked at me, I—"

I thought he was going to fall apart and give up, but he apparently saw Emma. She was directly behind me and I never found out what she did or said, but something passed between them and a change came over him. He raised his head and looked at me and then at the prosecutor and then at the audience, and he seemed to defy everybody in the whole world. He was proclaiming his outrage at the injustice about to be perpetrated here in this courtroom.

"It was between him and me," Demming said firmly, "and I realized nobody was going to help me. Nobody. He wanted to kill me and he tried to, he had a knife and he made a lunge, but I ducked away and grabbed for his arm, and somehow he tripped and his arm got twisted and he fell down. The point of the knife must have been leveled at his chest. It's all so hazy, but he fell and all his weight drove that knife straight into him. I don't think he even grunted, but he almost toppled on me. He hit my feet and I jumped back and suddenly realized I was still alive and I was free, really free and—" Demming started to sob. "I'd killed him. I'd killed a man, but it was his life or mine and—"

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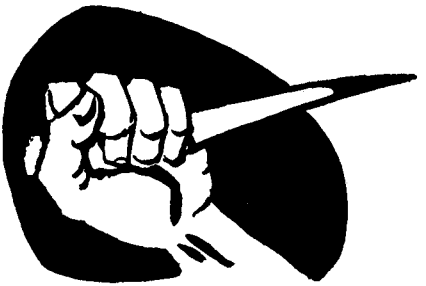
"That's all," I said quickly, not wanting the jury to lose the impact of his outburst. "The defense rests."

It took the jury ten minutes to reach a verdict. Not guilty by reason of self-defense.

Richard Demming, sitting next to me and holding his wife's hand, seemed dazed. "They believed me," he said. "Mr. Hill, they believed me! And I'll never forget what you did for me."

"What I did," I said drily, "was persuade you to commit perjury. And I abetted it."



THE LAST WRITES

by MARILYN DINEEN

A journalist for thirty years,
Bill wrote his copy full of fears
That when he'd jotted past his prime,
He might end up without a dime.

One day a tout gave Bill a tip
For giving poverty the slip.
Bill raced right out, withdrew his cash
And bet it on the Silver Flash.

The Flash grew dim, he fell behind
And left Bill with a fevered mind.
He scratched that tout, made news again
Not writing with but *in* the pen.

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1991
EQMM READERS AWARD

Peter Lovesey's "The Crime of Miss Oyster Brown" had such a clear lead over the other contenders for this year's Readers Award—including his own third-place story "Supper With Miss Shivers"—that we might have safely bet on its being first past the post long before the December 31 deadline.

The spirit of the Readers Award is, of course, one of celebration, not competition, yet images of sport come naturally to mind when we think of Peter Lovesey. Not only is the author an enthusiast of long-distance running, he is something of an expert on the subject, with two published non-fiction books and a prize-winning mystery relating to the history of foot-races to his credit. He turned to fiction writing and produced his groundbreaking first mystery *Wobble to Death* (one of the first modern mysteries to bring a Victorian setting to life) in 1969, on seeing an advertisement in the London *Times* for a crime novel competition with a £1,000 prize. The book introduced Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackeray, Victorian detectives who appeared in several subsequent novels and helped to establish for the author a reputation as one of the foremost contemporary writers of historical crime fiction. Mr. Lovesey has also written a number of non-series crime novels and many short stories, including some two dozen memorable pieces for EQMM. We are delighted to see him receive this formal recognition for his contributions to our magazine and offer our heartiest congratulations.

Second place this year goes to Clark Howard, four-time winner of the Readers Award, for his short novel "Dark Conception." Mr. Howard's continuing popularity with our readers attests to the mesmerizing power of his storytelling. May we see his name on this page for many years to come!

Once again a Georges Simenon story, "Maigret's Christmas," is the overwhelming favorite among the reprints—a fitting tribute to the great writer in a year in which we reprinted more mystery classics than ever before, in honor of our 50th anniversary.

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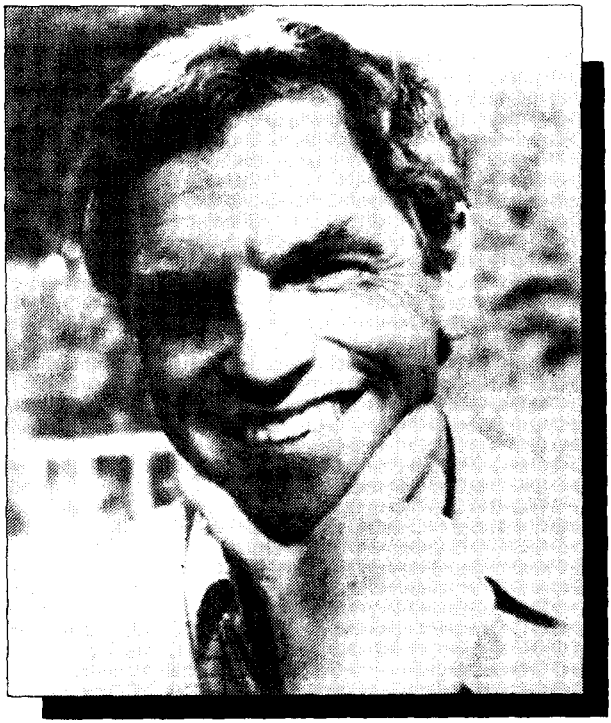
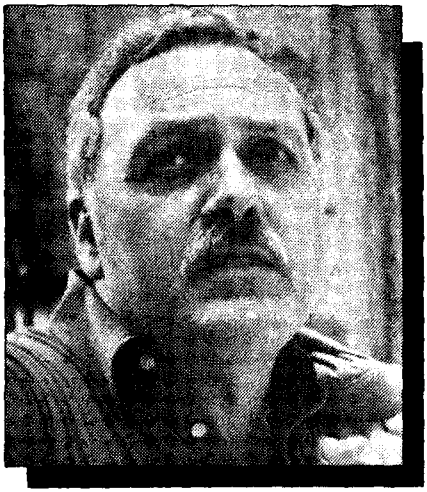


PETER LOVESEY



CLARK HOWARD

GEORGES SIMENON

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The gun show was held each year shortly before the beginning of the hunting season, occupying a large domed area located just north of the city limits. Leopold parked his car in the lot and immediately spotted Lieutenant Burnz, one of the other instructors at the police academy.

"Looking for a weapon, Captain?" he asked. They'd never been friendly enough to use first names.

"Not really. I just thought I might lend a hand to some of the recruits. A lot of them will be here."

"They always are. There's something about a gun that attracts 'em. American cops couldn't exist without guns like the British bobbies do."

"They'd be dead men," Leopold agreed . . .

LEOPOLD'S CLASS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

When they first asked Captain Leopold to teach a class on violent crime at the police academy, he was convinced that his days on the force were numbered. "Mandatory retirement at age sixty-five," he reminded his wife Molly. "This is their way of easing me out."

"I think it's something of an honor," she told him. "Not everyone's asked to teach."

"At your age you can view it as an honor. You'll still be filing legal briefs twenty-five years from now."

"I hope not!" She gathered up her coat. "Come on—we'd better get going if we're meeting Fletcher and his wife for dinner."

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It was a cool August evening just a week before the new class at the police academy was due to report. Lieutenant Fletcher had done the best he could to boost Leopold's spirits, and his wife Carol joined in the attempt. "They're not putting you out to pasture," she insisted. "You'll only be lecturing two mornings a week. The rest of the time everything will be the same."

"I know, I know," Leopold grumbled. "But I'm afraid it's just the first step. I don't feel old. I don't feel like retiring!"

"You'll be helping a lot of young people just starting in police work," Molly Leopold argued. "And it has nothing to do with retiring."

That was when Carol and Fletcher exchanged glances and she asked, "Is it time to tell them?"

"Tell us what?" Leopold asked.

It was Carol who replied. "Our daughter, Lisa. We didn't want to tell anyone till we were sure she was really going to do it. She's in the new police academy class."

"Lisa?" Leopold could hardly believe it. He tried to remember the shy teenager he'd seen at cookouts and summer picnics, then realized that had been a decade ago.

"That's wonderful!" Molly enthused. "She was a paralegal for a time, wasn't she?"

Fletcher nodded. "Ever since college. But she's twenty-six now and decided she preferred law enforcement. She applied for the class and was accepted. You know we can't get enough women officers these days."

Leopold knew that their son Mike, six years older than Lisa, was a television producer in Chicago, newly married and with a child on the way. Lisa'd had her own apartment since graduation and Fletcher hadn't talked much about her. "I think that's great," Leopold told him. "I'll look forward to seeing her again."

Molly smiled. "Does that mean you'll teach the class?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Now let's order some food."

The police academy classes that did not involve firearms or hand-to-hand combat were held on the campus of the local community college. Leopold's first class, on Tuesday morning, was in a small auditorium that was still larger than necessary for the fifty-seven members of the academy class. He glanced down over the list of names and noted the presence of four women students. One of them was Lisa Fletcher.

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As they filed in and took their seats, he studied each of the young women in turn, trying to remember Lisa as she'd been the last time he saw her. One woman was black, and another was dark-haired. He ruled them out and watched for the next one. As soon as he saw her he remembered the high forehead and perfect face, with her hair pulled back into a single braid that reached her shoulders. He knew the braid would be gone soon. Policewomen needed to keep their hair short.

She passed in front of him on the way to her seat, and he murmured, "Hello, Lisa."

She seemed surprised that he'd addressed her. "Hello, Captain," she replied, keeping her head down.

When they were all seated, Leopold cleared his throat. "Now we begin. I'm Captain Leopold, in charge of the police department's violent-crime squad. Back when I started, it was the homicide squad. The fact that the high command changed the name tells you something about the changes in urban crime during the past three decades. Today's violent crimes are mainly unpremeditated, the result of a family squabble or a teenage burglary or a drug deal gone wrong. Often the victims are innocent bystanders, abused wives, elderly homeowners. During these next weeks I'll be telling you what you really face out there, and how to act and react at a crime scene. As part of the uniformed force, you won't be conducting investigations of major crimes, but your actions are important nonetheless. We've had murder cases spoiled or strengthened by the actions of the first police officer on the scene."

The class listened intently, with several of them making notes as he spoke. Working from minimal notes that he'd prepared the previous evening, Leopold found himself warming to the topic. The hour went faster than he imagined possible, and at the end of it he was actually looking forward to the next one.

He stopped Lisa Fletcher on the way out to chat with her. "I think it's wonderful that you're going into police work, Lisa. I know your father is very proud."

"Thank you, Captain." She had a nice smile that she used infrequently, and her eyes were Carol's—deep and greenish-blue. "Oh, I want you to meet a friend of mine, Grover White."

Grover, another of the students, was attired like Lisa in the modified police uniform all academy recruits wore. He was tall and dark-haired, the sort young women considered handsome. "It's an honor to be in your class, sir," he told Leopold, making him feel about

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eighty years old. "I believe you knew my father in the old days—Sergeant Max White?"

The memory came back to Leopold for the first time in years. "Sure, I knew Max. How's he doing?" Max had lost a leg when his patrol car smashed into a bridge abutment while he was pursuing a speeder.

"Pretty good. He's still in Florida. I'm hoping he can come up for my graduation from the police academy."

Leopold smiled at them both. "A couple of cops' kids. Your fathers can be proud of you."

In the weeks that followed, Leopold grew to know a good many of the class by name. It was not unusual for one or two students to catch him after his lectures with a question. They were especially interested in firearms. Leopold's city was one of those that had recently decided the traditional .38 caliber police revolver with its six shots was not enough firepower against drug dealers and other criminals who often took to the streets with a semiautomatic MAC-10 or an Uzi. Police officers were now issued Italian-made 9-mm semiautomatic pistols with a 15-shot magazine.

The police academy trainees had to purchase the weapons themselves, at a cost of $380 each. Many of them wanted a second or third weapon as well, to keep at home or even carry with them in high-crime areas. Leopold started out explaining that such weapons, if carried while on duty, were against department regulations. "Keep them at home," he advised, knowing that some of them would ignore him.

One of Grover White's friends was a young Hispanic named Charlie Rodriguez. He had dark skin and a gleaming white smile, and his hand was constantly in the air with a question during class. Leopold had been annoyed at first to have his lectures interrupted, but he soon learned that Rodriguez's questions were quite intelligent, cutting to the core of the issue. After class one day, the smiling young man intercepted him and asked, "Is a gun show a good place to buy an extra weapon, Captain? There's one in town this weekend."

"Well, you'll get to compare a great many different weapons. What are you looking for?"

"Something my wife can have at home when I'm working nights."

"Tell you what," Leopold said, "I'm going to stop by there myself early Saturday afternoon. If you're around then, I'll help you make a choice."

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He had no real need to attend the show, since he had no intention of buying another weapon for himself, but he knew that several of his class would be there. They'd all been issued their badges, which they could use to purchase additional weapons even without a permit.

The gun show was held each year shortly before the beginning of the hunting season, occupying a large domed arena located just north of the city limits. Leopold parked his car in the lot and immediately spotted Lieutenant Burnz, one of the other instructors at the police academy. Burnz was around fifty, a big man who'd been fighting a weight problem for as long as Leopold had known him.

"Looking to buy a weapon, Captain?" he asked. They'd never been friendly enough to use first names.

"Not really. I just thought I might lend a hand to some of the recruits. A lot of them will be here."

"They always are. There's something about a gun that attracts 'em. American cops couldn't exist without guns like the British bobbies do."

"They'd be dead men," Leopold agreed.

They'd gone in the arena's main entrance, opposite an impressive display of hunting rifles, shotguns, and pistols. "And there's always someone like the Raffer brothers to sell them," Burnz commented.

Marty and Sam Raffer had been in the gun business for most of their lives, making enough money to afford a downtown retail store and booths at gun shows all over New York and New England. Sam, the younger, was the ladies' man. His wife had divorced him the previous year for fooling around, and when she'd demanded a big settlement the story went that older brother Marty had slipped a rattlesnake into her house. It scared her half to death and she moved to the West Coast the following week, signing the divorce papers without a murmur.

It was Marty who saw them enter and waved them over to the booth. "We've got a special on a nice little Derringer here, fellas. Perfect for a second gun."

"Not interested," Burnz said.

"We've got a range out back by the lake if you want to try a few rounds."

Burnz grunted and kept walking. "Those guys'll never change," he told Leopold. "Always just this side of the law."

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Up ahead Leopold spotted Lisa Fletcher with two of her male classmates, Rodriguez and White. All three were wearing their grey recruit uniforms. "I'll see you later," he told Burnz, and went to join them.

"Enjoying the show?" Lisa asked him.

"It's always pretty much the same. Looking for good bargains?"

Rodriguez snorted. "Anything would be a bargain after paying $380 for these service pistols."

"What do you think of this Beretta, Captain?" Grover White asked, hefting a 1934-model automatic pistol in his left hand.

Leopold took it from him. "See this spur coming off the bottom of the clip? It's curved to give you a comfortable three-fingered grip on the butt, with your index finger on the trigger, but in actual use this spur can snag on pockets when you try to draw fast. People often file them off. It's been modified on later models, although the .22 caliber 70S still has a problem, as does a Turkish handgun you see sometimes, the MKE .38 pistol. It's best to avoid them for situations where a fast draw may be necessary."

The young men stayed with the guns, but Lisa walked along with Leopold. "You know a great deal about guns and police work, don't you?"

"I should, after a lifetime in it."

"I was just a child when you used to come to our house for cookouts. I remember how you helped my brother once when father couldn't."

"Your father knows as much as I do about police work. We've been together for so long I sometimes think we can read each other's minds."

"But you're older and you're a Captain."

"I've been captain for thirty years. It's just the structure of the department here. Doesn't mean a thing."

"If you retire, would my father get your job?"

"He sure as hell deserves it, but politics are important in this city. For all I know, the mayor might have a cousin from Bangor or someplace with enough civil service qualifications to apply."

They went outside and heard the sound of regularly spaced shooting coming from the small lake behind the arena. The Raffer brothers, not to be outdone by anyone, had set up a shooting range where a variety of handguns and rifles could be test-fired at a bobbing target in the water.

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Sam Raffer, the younger brother, was supervising it. "Want to try your skill, Captain?" he asked, sounding like a sideshow barker at a carnival shooting gallery.

"I'm beyond that," he said, but was surprised when Lisa stepped up and took the .22 caliber target pistol in her firm right hand. She put three out of four shots into the bobbing target without visible effort.

"You're pretty good, Miss Fletcher. Rodriguez said you were." Raffer gave her his best smile. "I've got a little handgun inside that you'd just love."

When Lisa agreed to follow him in, Leopold cautioned, "Make sure you're not alone with him. Sam's got a reputation as a ladies' man." She smiled and said nothing, and he wondered if he was sounding too much like a Dutch uncle from another era.

"I'll see you in class," he called after her.

As it turned out, Leopold decided to grab a bite to eat at a diner down the road. There were a couple of sheriff's deputies in one of the booths and he joined them, chatting about mutual friends. Molly was out for the evening, dining with a couple of summer interns her firm wanted to hire out of law school, and he was in no hurry to get home to the empty house. The late September evening was almost balmy as he left the diner and walked back to his car.

The gun show at the arena was over for the day, and as he drove past the small lake he noticed in the semi-darkness that the Raffers' firing range was down too. There was something lying near the water's edge, though. It looked like a pile of clothes or rags. It could have been a body.

Leopold pulled his car off the road and walked back to check on it. He'd done it a hundred times before during his career. Usually it was nothing. Once or twice it had been a body.

This time it was clothing. But something about it made him bend to pick it up. Even in the darkness he could recognize the recruit uniform of the police academy. That, and a woman's undergarments. He unfolded the shirt and held it so that moonlight fell across the nametag.

Fletcher.

He broke into a cold sweat as he stared at the dark waters of the lake. Almost at once the waters parted as a nude Lisa Fletcher shot to the surface. She must have been as startled as he was by their confrontation. "Lisa! What in hell—?"

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"I—I was trying to cool off," she explained, emerging from the water as he quickly turned his back.

"Cool off? It's nighttime, and the temperature's below seventy!"

She dressed quickly in silence, not bothering to dry herself off. Leopold was at a loss for words. This twenty-six-year-old woman, the daughter of his best friend and co-worker, had been swimming nude at night in a lake behind the arena, and she was not ready to offer any viable explanation for her action.

"Don't you have anything else to say, Lisa?" he asked finally.

She turned toward him, and in the moonlight he could see the dampness from her body soaking through the uniform shirt. "I think there's a body down there," she said quietly.

Leopold contacted the sheriff's scuba squad, and shortly after dawn they recovered the body of Sam Raffer. By that time he'd been reported missing by his brother, with whom he'd been staying since his divorce. Though the death was outside of Leopold's jurisdiction, Lisa's involvement made it a major concern to him. He arrived back at the arena early, in time to speak with the sheriff's detectives handling the investigation. One man, Lieutenant Greenbaum, had already spoken with Marty Raffer.

"I called him as soon as we ID'd the body. He's meeting us at the morgue to make the official identification."

Leopold stared at the body bag as it was being carried away. "Any sign of violence?"

"Bruised temple. Might have been before or after he went in the water. His brother says he was a poor swimmer."

"All the more reason for him to stay away from the water."

"This young woman who discovered the body—"

"Lisa Fletcher, Lieutenant Fletcher's daughter. She's in the current police academy class."

Greenbaum lifted his eyebrows. "What was she doing in the lake last night?"

"Said she wanted to cool off. Then she thought she saw a body."

"In the dark?"

"I don't know. Let me talk to her again."

The sheriff's detective hesitated. "It's my jurisdiction, Captain."

"I know that, but it's Fletcher's daughter."

"All right. Can you bring her to my office for a statement?"

"Of course."

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Leopold was remembering that the last time he'd seen Lisa prior to her moonlight swim she'd been with Sam Raffer. Even though it was Sunday, he decided to stop by the office. For one thing, he knew Fletcher would be on duty.

Fletcher was waiting when Leopold arrived at headquarters later that morning. "What's this about Lisa? What happened last night?"

Leopold took a deep breath and told him what he knew, glossing over the fact of Lisa's nudity. "She must have seen or bumped into the body under water," he told Fletcher.

"Do you think they were having a moonlight swim together? You know Sam Raffer's reputation as well as I do."

"Raffer was fully clothed. Lisa had left her things on the shore."

"Are you going to talk to her again?"

"It's not our jurisdiction. Greenbaum's handling it for the county, but I told him I'd bring her over today to make a statement."

Fletcher was a troubled man. "What's it all about, Captain?"

"I don't know."

"Was Raffer murdered?"

"I don't know that, either."

Lisa Fletcher was of little help when she arrived just before lunch. Grover White was with her, and Leopold noted the way he held her hand for a moment before she sat down, as if trying to reassure her of his support. "Grover, I'd like to speak with Lisa alone, please," Leopold said.

"Certainly, sir. I'll go on my way, Lisa."

Once inside Leopold's tiny glass-walled office, Lisa asked, "Have they established the cause of death yet?"

"Death by drowning, though he may have been slugged first. There's a bruise on his right temple, possibly made by a gun butt."

"The sheriff's office in charge?"

He nodded. "Lieutenant Greenbaum. He wants to see you today for a statement." After a moment he added, "Your father is very concerned."

"I know. He's afraid I might be involved in something that will hurt my chances at the academy."

"Are you? Involved in something?"

"No, Captain, I'm not."

He flinched when she used his title, remembering the little girl she'd once been. "Had you ever met Sam Raffer or his brother before yesterday?"

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"No. I think Charlie Rodriguez had been in their store a few times. He introduced me."

"Tell me why you stripped off your clothes and went into the lake last night."

"I wanted to cool off without getting them wet."

"And you saw the body, even in the dark?"

"I thought it was a body, yes."

He wasn't happy with her story, and he knew Lieutenant Greenbaum wouldn't be, either. On the way over he tried to tell her this. "He's going to want the truth, Lisa."

"That's what he'll get."

Leopold sighed. "If you're involved in something, it could cost you your appointment to the academy."

She turned to look at him. "I hope it won't come to that."

Greenbaum listened to her story and asked a few questions, obviously treading softly because of Leopold's presence and her father's position. After a half-hour he got to his feet. "I may need to speak to you again, Miss Fletcher. If you think of anything else, please call me."

"I will," she promised.

When Leopold arrived at the academy the following day, he sought out Lieutenant Burnz, who was just finishing his class in crowd control. Leopold didn't see Lisa among the recruits, but he spotted Grover White receiving a reprimand from Burnz for a torn pocket. "I didn't realize it showed," White murmured, putting a hand to his left breast to cover it.

"Have your girlfriend sew it," Burnz suggested. "And be a little quicker with the answers next time."

"Yes, sir."

When he'd gone, Leopold asked Burnz, "Do you have a minute? It's about the Raffer brothers."

"Yeah, I heard what happened to Sam."

"You knew them both. What do you think?"

"There are a half-dozen guys in this town who'd love to have kicked his ass into that lake. Including his brother, at times."

"What was he doing wrong?"

"The brothers have always had a shady operation. Illegal guns in large quantities. We've just never been able to prove it. Sam always took more chances than Marty. We figured we'd hook him someday."

"Hook him like a fish."

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"Yeah, only I guess he couldn't swim."

Lisa wasn't in any of her classes that day, and on the way home Leopold stopped by her apartment. She answered the door wearing a tank top and jeans. "Hello, Captain."

"I was concerned when you weren't at class today."

"I was just a bit upset after everything that's happened." She turned from the open door and he took that as an invitation to enter.

She seated herself by the window and picked up a grey academy shirt she'd been sewing. He was pretty sure it was the one Grover had been wearing earlier. "Would you be surprised if I told you Sam Raffer had been murdered?" he asked.

"I suppose not," she replied, not looking up from her sewing. "Charlie Rodriguez says he had a shady past."

Leopold could see that her hand was shaking. He went up and took it in one of his. "Tell me about it, Lisa. You have to tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell," she insisted.

As she steadied her hand he saw the nametag *White* pinned to the shirt pocket. "You and Grover are pretty friendly, aren't you?"

"Sure. He just heard that his father's coming up from Florida for the academy graduation. Isn't that great?"

"I'm sure he'll be just as proud of his child as your father."

She suddenly put down the shirt and turned to face him. "Marty Raffer's been threatening me," she told Leopold.

"What about?"

"His brother's death. He thinks I was responsible. He phoned last night and warned me to stay away from dark alleys."

"All right," Leopold said. "I'll have a talk with him."

"He's dangerous. I'm sure they were involved in some crooked gun deals."

"I'll take care of it."

The Raffer gun shop was on the fringes of downtown, in a mixed racial area of older buildings and vacant lots awaiting federal housing funds. The lot next door was used for parking, and as Leopold pulled into a space he had a clear view of the gun shop's side door. It was after six and the place was closed for the day, but a familiar figure was just leaving. Leopold wondered what after-hours business Lieutenant Burnz had with Marty Raffer.

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After Burnz had driven away, Leopold crossed the lot and rang the side door delivery bell. After a moment the door was opened by Marty Raffer himself. "Captain Leopold! What brings you here?"

"I was sorry to hear about your brother."

"Yeah. Well, he was never a good swimmer. I gotta get over to the funeral parlor now."

Leopold planted himself in the doorway. "Do you think it was an accident?"

"I think he was murdered, maybe by that girl who found the body."

"I hear you've been threatening her, Marty."

"He was my kid brother. If she killed him she should suffer."

"Just a tip—stay away from her."

The balding man nodded. "Thanks, Captain, but I guess my brother's death isn't your concern."

"What you do in the city is my concern. This store is my concern, if you've been selling guns illegally."

"Go easy, Captain. I'm a good friend, but a bad enemy."

"I'll remember that."

Leopold went back to his car. It wasn't his case but he couldn't drop it. Somehow Lisa Fletcher was involved. She'd gone into that lake for an important reason. Perhaps Raffer was trying to rape her and they'd fallen in together during the struggle. But if that was the case, why lie about it?

He thought about it all evening, even after Molly tried to get him out of his black mood. "It's not your case," she reminded him. "It may not even be murder."

"Marty Raffer is scum. He always has been. And there's Fletcher's daughter to consider."

"Lisa? What about her?"

"She's involved," he said simply. "I don't mean just finding the body. She's hiding something."

"I hope not. Fletcher and Carol are so proud of her joining the force. It would be a terrible blow to them if anything ruined her chances."

They went to bed early, just after eleven, because Leopold had a busy day coming up. He went right to sleep, but woke in the middle of the night as Molly left the bed to go to the bathroom down the hall. He opened one eye to peer at the digital clock and saw that it was 3:13.

He had almost dropped back to sleep when he heard Molly scream.

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Leopold was out of bed in an instant, grabbing the extra revolver he kept in his bedside drawer. He met her in the hall, flipped on the light switch, and saw the writhing snake on the floor by her feet. He blew its head off with a single shot.

"My God, Jules—!"

"It was just a grass snake," he told her, hugging her tight. "No rattler this time."

In the morning he told Fletcher about it. "We'd left the bathroom window open an inch or so. He slit the screen near the bottom where it wouldn't show and let the snake in. Very effective, even if it wasn't poisonous. I can understand why Sam Raffer's ex-wife beat it out of town."

"You're sure it was Marty?"

"I'm sure. He didn't like my nosing around. I'll never prove it, though. He's a clever one."

"You think he killed his brother?"

"I don't care any more, Fletcher. This is a personal thing with me now."

"Don't do anything foolish."

"I have to see Burnz first."

He found the lieutenant in his office down the hall. "I'm glad this police academy thing is almost over," Burnz said. "It really messes up my work schedule."

Leopold sat down opposite his cluttered desk. "Tell me about Marty Raffer. What's he up to? What can we get him for?"

Burnz frowned. "I heard about last night. You think it was Marty?"

"Who else? It's not the first time he's used that trick. He wanted me to know it was him."

Burnz scratched his ear. "I don't know what he's been up to—"

"Like hell you don't! I saw you come out his side door yesterday, after closing time. Are you on the take?"

"God, Leopold! The walls have ears around here!"

"I'm not wearing a wire. I'm just asking a question. One way or another I'm going to nail that guy."

Burnz stared at his desk. "I found out about it by accident. You know how the recruits always look for guns to buy. Once they have their badge, everyone wants a second or third weapon. Most cops I know own four or five handguns. The Raffer brothers have been using the names and badge numbers of recruits for their records of

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gun sales, then shipping the weapons overseas. There's always a ready market with the IRA or some other group. No one ever checks up on the sales unless the weapon is used in a crime, and with overseas sales they've nothing to worry about."

"They were paying you off?"

"I took a little money once, maybe twice. Not recently. I stopped there yesterday to tell Marty I wasn't covering up on a murder. If Sam's death was linked to illegal gun sales, he was on his own."

"I hope that's the truth," Leopold said. "If you're lying—"

"I'm not."

"Were any of the recruits involved in this scheme?"

"Not usually, but once in a while Sam would slip someone a hundred for a list of their names and badge numbers."

Leopold was beginning to see things more clearly now, and he knew what had to be done. "I'll see you later," he told Burnz.

He stopped by his office long enough to phone Lisa, hoping she'd be at her apartment. He spoke softly, aware that Fletcher's desk was just the other side of the glass partition. "Lisa, this is Leopold."

"Hello, Captain."

"I wanted you to know I'm going after Marty Raffer. He put a snake in our house last night to frighten Molly and me. I'm not going to let him run around loose any longer. I think we have enough evidence to charge him with killing his brother."

"I—"

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I'm just surprised, that's all."

"I'll call later and let you know how I make out. I plan to go to his gun shop now with Greenbaum from the sheriff's office."

It wasn't completely true, and when he drove to Raffer's store he was alone in the car. There was no point in bringing Greenbaum along when there was no evidence.

He'd forgotten that Marty would be at the funeral parlor that afternoon. The clerk on duty said he'd be back a little after four, so Leopold waited. At four-fifteen Marty's car pulled into the lot. The balding man got out and was halfway to the side door before he noticed Leopold.

"Hello, Captain. What can I do for you?"

"My wife found your little gift, Marty. Scared her half to death."

"What's the matter? She doesn't like snakes?" He said it with a smirk on his face.

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"I'm going to put you away for your gun deals. You'll be an old man by the time they let you out."

"What're you talkin' about?"

"Burnz has told me everything."

Marty Raffer was standing about twenty feet away, and he moved before Leopold realized he was going for a gun. He half turned away and then turned back, and the snub-nosed revolver was in his hand.

Suddenly they were not alone. Another car turned into the parking lot, coming fast. Leopold never knew what Marty thought, but he must have realized the car was some further threat. He saw it bearing down on him and turned the pistol from Leopold toward the vehicle. He fired twice and the driver's windshield shattered, an instant before the car slammed into Marty Raffer and crushed him against the brick wall of his building.

Leopold ran to the car and tried to pry open the driver's door. He saw already that it was too late. Police recruit Grover White was slumped over the steering wheel, and one of Marty's bullets had gone through his forehead.

Leopold didn't have an opportunity to speak with Lisa Fletcher alone until the day of the funeral, when they walked together away from the grave of Grover White. The young man's father had come up from Florida in his wheelchair and Leopold had asked him to remain in town for the academy graduation the following week.

"We'll be having a brief tribute to your son," he told the crippled former policeman. "I'd like you to be there, Max."

"Sure," the man replied, his eyes misting over.

"Your son died a hero, saving my life."

Then he'd walked with Lisa, up the gently sloping hill among the tombstones, away from the cars waiting on the road. "You were very kind to Max White," she said.

"He was a good cop in his day. I couldn't tell him his son was a murderer."

She stopped dead in her tracks and stared at him. "You know what happened?"

"Pretty much. I'll confess that I set you up when I phoned to tell you I was on my way to arrest Marty Raffer. I was hoping you'd tell Grover and you did just that. I wanted to force a confession out of him. Naturally I never dreamed he and Marty would kill each other."

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"The Raffers were selling guns illegally overseas," she explained. "They used the names of police recruits on their sales records, and they paid Grover for a list of the new class, with badge numbers."

Leopold nodded. "When Grover wanted out, he and Sam Raffer argued by the edge of the lake that night. He slugged Raffer and pushed him in the water."

"It wasn't murder," Lisa insisted. "It would have been manslaughter at worst. He didn't know Raffer couldn't swim."

"It would have been enough to get him kicked out of the academy," Leopold said. "He hit Raffer with a gun butt."

"I thought I was covering up for him. How'd you know he did it?"

"It had to be something urgent that made you jump into that dark lake, peeling off your clothes first to keep them dry. You knew where the body was and it seemed likely you went after something. My first thought was a weapon, but you had nothing visible in your hands when you emerged from the water."

"You peeked?"

He felt himself blush like a schoolboy. "Not really, but I did notice your hands. If you retrieved something from the water it had to be something small, something you had to go after because it would identify Raffer's assailant beyond doubt. Then I noticed the torn pocket on Grover White's shirt, as did Lieutenant Burnz. It was right where the recruits' nametags are pinned on. I knew you didn't dive in after your own nametag, because it was on the shirt you left by the water. Now was there any confirmation that Grover White slugged Raffer and lost his nametag in the struggle? Yes, there was—of a sort. Raffer was hit by the gun butt on the right temple. If he yanked a nametag or anything else from the killer's clothes, he had to be facing the killer at the time. If he was hit on the right temple, then the killer swung the weapon with his left hand."

"Any of us could be left-handed."

"No, you fired with your right hand when you hit that bobbing target in the lake. Grover asked me about a Beretta pistol at the gun show, and he was hefting it with his left hand at the time. Sure, Charlie might be left-handed, but he didn't have a torn pocket."

She was silent for a moment, staring off at the distant trees. Then she started to speak. "I saw it happen. They were tussling and Raffer grabbed his shirt. Grover hit him with the butt of his service pistol and Raffer toppled into the lake. It was just about dark then. I ran up and Grover was in a panic. He'd just realized that his nametag was gone. I told him to keep going and I'd look for it. When it wasn't

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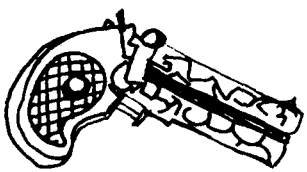
on the shore I figured it was still in Raffer's hand. I took off my clothes and dove in, partly in case Raffer was still alive, partly to retrieve the nametag. Even in the dark I could tell he was dead. There was no breathing at all. Grover's nametag was still clutched in his right hand."

"I'm sorry I lured Grover to the gun shop. I feel responsible for what happened. Maybe we're both responsible."

"Is that why you arranged the tribute at the academy graduation?"

Leopold turned to look at her. They were heading back down the hill toward the cars. "Partly. Mostly it's because of his father. Max White's been through a lot. He deserves a son who's a little bit of a hero."

She smiled at him. "You've got a lot of class, Captain. Did anyone ever tell you that?"



DETECTIVERSE

LOVE IS NOT ALL

by BEATRICE S. McCRACKEN

A killer who once went a-wooing
Indulged in much billing and cooing.
But he struck a false note
When he got to her throat,
Now it's twenty-to-life
That he's doing.

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a ***FIRST*** short story by

ROBERT CAMPBELL

Robert Campbell is the highly acclaimed author of the La La Land series of crime thrillers published by Poseidon Books in hardcover and Pocket Books in paperback. He is an Edgar Award winner for the first of his seven Jimmy Flannery mysteries, The Junkyard Dog, *and received a nomination for an Academy Award for his script for* Man of a Thousand Faces. *His novel* Where Pigeons Go to Die *was produced and aired as an NBC-TV special in 1990.*

Mr. Campbell has so many credits to his name, it came as a surprise to us to learn that he has never before published a short story—all the more surprising in that he turns out to be a master of the form . . .

THE JOURNEYER

by ROBERT CAMPBELL

Forty years had gone by since he'd been in the university city; Oxford was much changed. All the bustle and hustle, homeless lying about in the graveyard in the center of the town, right by the tottering church plastered with signs announcing this and that. Admission to the tower, appeals for contributions for a new roof, a new altarpiece gave it the look of a commercial establishment with gaudy goods—spiritual awakening, masses for the dead, and quick beneficences on offer.

It was only when, after payment, admission was granted at the gates of the colleges and passage allowed into the walled gardens and lawns, quads and pathways, that anything like the easy grace and tranquility of these places of ancient learning were arrived at. There was much to be missed even then.

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The girls wore jeans and running shoes instead of lisle stockings, pleated skirts, and sensible oxford shoes. Sweaters tied about the waist or worn about the shoulders, the sleeves looped once like a pair of thin embracing arms.

The boys looked less changed, trousers, sweaters, and anoraks being ageless male costumes.

There were very few young men or women batting around in sleeveless gowns, flying here and there along the paths with the intent look of those who were the keepers of the flame as they had once done.

Bicycles everywhere. So that was one thing, at least, not much changed.

There were groups of tourists being shown around by docents wearing their ribbons of office.

He felt aloof from them. He needed no guide, although he had to admit there was so much he'd forgotten after forty years. He remembered that he had not felt so much a stranger then, even when new to the university and city, even knowing far less than he knew now after years of casual reading.

That was a quality of youth, never to feel a stranger no matter where one might find oneself, he realized with a sense of discovery. He felt the insight notable. He would write it down when he returned in the evening to his bed and breakfast on a lane just off the Bodley Road, a two-mile walk away.

He'd never been a student at any of the Oxford colleges. He'd merely been a journeyer in England that year when he was twenty-three; in all of Europe but most memorably in England.

Twenty-three years old, temporarily relieved of the need to make a living because of a legacy left him by an expired aunt. A young man looking for adventures and finding them everywhere.

Adventure to some is braving the hardships of mountainsides and gorges; scaling the Himalayas. Or beating through bush and thorn on the way to the Nile's source. Or spending a season excavating the ruins of Karnak.

But adventure to a young man of twenty-three is finding a woman of a likely age and discovering of what she is made. The mind of her and the body—breasts and belly and tender core.

Oddly—or perhaps not so oddly—he remembered few of the names of the girls met and tasted during that adventuresome year; few of their faces. That is to say he remembered nearly all of them but somehow could not put name and face together, separating them

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one from another, fixing face to form and both to mind. So that they had become one in his mind, the several he'd embraced and enjoyed.

Perhaps it had been the openness of his desire for them, his smile, his tentative stammerings, the easy way his cheeks colored in pleasure or mild distress, making his blue eyes seem so much bluer, his even teeth so much whiter—everything that was fair and beautiful about him then so much more beautiful—that made him so successful with the girls and young women.

Whatever the catalyst might have been it was as though an attractive young woman waited for him everywhere. On the ship crossing the Atlantic. In Copenhagen, waiting for him in the Tivoli Gardens, the very first night ashore. In Oslo a young woman smiled at him as he counted the trees in Gustav Viegland's fountain, her body proving to be every bit as fine as that of the adolescent girl flying through the tree of bronze around the basin. In Stockholm there was the secretary with the face of a Botticelli angel met in the Riche Bar. In Paris, Rome, Hamburg, Brussels, there were young women waiting to embrace him.

And in Oxford there had been many.

Now, as he walked the quiet pathways and busy streets, he passed hundreds of young people, girls and young women even more comely and desirable than the girls and young women he remembered from the past. He turned his head one way and the other searching for a glance or smile. When he stood still in the middle of the walk, they parted and spilled around him with scarcely a beat of hesitation in their progress, as though he were a lamppost or a stone.

Stunningly, with a whelming feeling of disaster, it came to him that he was invisible to a large portion of the world.

Suddenly his bladder was giving him a great deal of distress. He popped into a tea shop. There were counters selling pots and packaged teas and cozies on the ground floor. A split stairway led to the rest rooms on one side and the tearoom on the other.

As he turned to the steps leading to the rest rooms, the young woman at the counter called out, "Sir. Sir?" and when he paused to look her way, went on to say with some reluctance, "The facilities are for customers only. The management makes me say that."

"Well, that's understandable," he said, smiling to put her at ease, "if not always practical. There comes an age when such matters are urgent and someone might easily find himself in town and in need without cash enough for a meal, having left his checkbook at home."

"Oh, dear," she said. "If that's the case, go ahead. I won't tell."

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He continued on, noticing the sign saying much the same thing the salesgirl had said fixed to the beam above the stairway, went into the small lavatory, and relieved himself at the urinal, vaguely irritated that she'd been so quick to see the hypothesis he'd described as a probable description of his own predicament.

He zipped up, washed and dried his hands, surveyed himself in the mirror, unconsciously posing, stretching his neck so that the incipient turkey wattles wouldn't show, then went out and back up the short flight of stairs, turning sharply left at the top, throwing what he thought was a wickedly flirtatious smile over his shoulder at the girl, who'd forgotten all about him, and went down the double flight into the small tearoom at the bottom.

There was a woman, a morning shopper judging from the bag and bundles on the chair beside her and at her feet, sitting in the corner having her tea, and two young women, in their late twenties or early thirties, with that air of insistent modernity cultivated by executive females, having a conversation over small bowls of soup at another table tucked under the staircase.

He chose a table against the wall, steps away from a glass case that presented a variety of cakes and flans, close enough to the bill of fare chalked on a board behind the counter to be read without resorting to his glasses.

There was a doorway at one end of the counter space leading into a kitchen of sorts, equipped with a microwave oven and a refrigerator set into the wall, sinks and counter space where the simple fare on offer was prepared. What he could see of it was visible because of one of those large convex mirrors useful to householders backing their cars into busy streets or cashiers trying to keep an eye on inaccessible places in their shops. It left him with the odd feeling that he could observe the girls working there but that he could not be seen, though of course their seeing the customers was the whole purpose of the mirror.

Three girls were standing and sitting in the kitchen. Two too many, he thought, judging from the size of the place and the number of its customers here in the very middle of teatime.

One girl was perched on a stool, a bowl caught between her knees, peeling away at potatoes.

Another was standing at the sink washing dishes.

The third, a young woman of about eighteen or nineteen, presented a saucy face and a saucy manner, even doing nothing more than she was doing, standing there leaning against a counter, arms

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folded beneath her breasts, one arm crooked so that she might reach a curl falling from her tilted head with one hand, playing with it, legs crossed at the knee and one foot poised on the toe of her boot.

They all wore mob-caps such as actresses wear in Victorian comedies on stage, screen, and television. The sort that was even sometimes worn when he'd been twenty-three.

It was the girl with folded arms, doing nothing, who glanced up into the mirror and saw his reflection as he sat there glancing at the menu with one eye. She launched herself forward with a thrust of her buttock and made her way unhurriedly to his table.

"I don't know how hungry I am," he said.

"Just a pot of tea, then?"

"Well, it's been a long time since I've visited Oxford or the area and perhaps I should have a go at the local fare."

He expected her to remark upon his American accent but she didn't, she just stood there as though perfectly willing to wait there instead of elsewhere until he made up his mind, but never mind the chat.

"Will I have a cream tea, then?" he said, trying to phrase it as an Englishman might. "What sort of jam?"

"It comes with an assortment," she said.

"I could use a treat," he said, and looked at her in that certain shy, ingenuous way that had once been so attractive to girls and women when he'd been a young man. A little tease. A little overture. Hoping that she would make some pert, clever remark in return, opening up the way to familiarity, the exchange of small information that might lead to something.

She walked away without comment.

He tried to find a place to put his eyes. The executive woman facing him looked over her companion's shoulder. Her eyes looked into his and passed by. She hadn't seen him.

When the hot water and teapot arrived, he chose from a basket of foil packets a blend he'd never heard of before called Four Red Fruits. He was allowed two bags, which he placed in the heated pot and drenched with hot water, securing them as they steeped with the lid capturing their strings and tags.

There were three warm scones, a small bowl of Devonshire double cream as thick as the butter served in separate silver packets. Three tiny jars, the size called sample or introductory, one each of strawberry jam, orange marmalade, and plum jelly, made up the assort-

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ment. There was a small pitcher of ordinary cream for the tea alongside a silver bowl of castor sugar and a spoon.

He sat there over the light meal, his head down, paying attention to the precision with which he knifed cream and jelly on each piece of scone broken off from the whole. There was a bad moment when a strawberry seed insinuated itself under his denture. He had to execute some very tricky, subtle maneuvers of plate and tongue in order to remove it without giving anything away.

He wanted to cry.

By this stage of the game, when he'd been twenty-three, a young American abroad, he would have been in conversation with the two businesswomen, perhaps making plans to meet them both that evening, perhaps having them both together before the night was out, as had happened once in Stockholm and once again in Paris. He would have enchanted the waitress and perhaps even lured the other two out of the scullery to pass remarks with him so that he might have had a chance to look them all over and take his pick.

"Is everything all right?" the waitress asked.

He looked up with an expression of wild gratitude on his face because to her, at least, it seemed that he had not altogether disappeared. But before he could do more than swallow and nod, she was off to tender the bill to the shopper in the back and give back change to the businesswoman, doing her job, asking the questions concerning service and customer satisfaction according to the book.

A wave of hatred against her rose in his chest and he choked.

Through his watering eyes, he could see she'd stopped and was watching him.

No doubt fearing that the old bastard would have a heart attack or choke to death on her shift, he thought. As soon as he took a swallow of tea and nodded his head as though answering the question of everyone still in the establishment, she continued on her way, showing a pair of newcomers who had just appeared at the foot of the steps to a table.

He glanced their way. They were a middle-aged couple with the air of visitors determined to drink up every moment of their holiday so they'd have stories to tell when back at home.

He went slowly on with his own meal as they ordered tea and sandwiches.

He eavesdropped on their conversation when their meal was served.

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Now listen to that, he thought. Those two are going on about the publican's wife somewhere cutting off the crusts.

"It was ever so nice, cutting off the crusts."

"Reminds me of the pub we stopped in over to Land's End. Did the same thing. Cut off the crusts and loaded it full of prawns."

"Lovely that."

A young woman came in and ordered a bun and a container of milk at the counter, a student catching her lunch on the run, too busy with her life even to sit down and have a meal in a civilized manner. She looked right and left while she waited, her eyes bouncing over him with a skip and a jump.

Did you see? Her eyes slipped past me like I wasn't even here, he thought, anger spilling into his stomach, turning his cream tea sour. If I took me teef out and gummed her a smile she'd fink I was adorable. She'd want to take me home and put me on the shelf. Give me a little cuddle every now and then. I know the type. Notice the jeans? So tight you can see the crack. When she takes a step the denim rides right along her quim. Lovely that. Always in a state of high excitation she is. He watched her go to the stairs and mount the first flight. He thought of following her. He thought of following her without her ever knowing. Following her everywhere, even to her most private places. Confronting her when they were alone, when there was no one else around, nowhere else to put her eyes, nothing else to see but him.

"Anything else?"

"What?"

The waitress was standing there as though she'd read his thoughts about the student. Unless he was very much mistaken, there was a sly little smile at the corner of her mouth. For the first time he noticed she wore a small ceramic nametag pinning a handkerchief to her uniform blouse.

"What else do you have to offer, Hillary?" he asked, letting his tongue linger over her name as though savoring it.

"You mean something sweet?" she said, letting the smile grow.

"Well, perhaps something sweet with just a touch of tart."

Was he being too subtle for her, he wondered, all this playing about with words.

"We've got a nice slice of apple flan which is nice and sweet and a gooseberry tart with some tang to the sweetness."

So she'd got it after all. There was more to her than met the eye.

"Which would you recommend?"

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"I'd say the tart though it's a trifle dearer."

"Well, money's of no consequence."

"Then it'll be the gooseberry tart? With a nice spoonful of Devon cream on top?"

"So much cholesterol," he said, tapping his chest. "I don't know if I should."

"A man your age shouldn't be worrying about clogged arteries and heart attacks," she said.

"I'll have it with cream then."

He watched her hips, swaying more than they had before when there had been others in the tearoom, all the way through the kitchen doorway and then lifted his eyes to watch her prepare his treat. There was only the girl at the sink left. It was the end of tea-time and the other girl had already gone.

He watched Hillary's lips moving and heard the girl washing dishes laugh. Hillary lifted her eyes to the mirror and to his reflection as she turned to get the cream from the fridge.

Being very accommodating, very flirtatious, she was. All of a sudden, end of shift, flirting with the elderly tourist, stroking him, even being a bit suggestive, in hopes of a substantial tip. He might be hopeful but he was no fool. The looks, or lack of them, he'd received all day from the young people about him had taught him a harsh lesson and he didn't need telling twice.

The girl at the sink did the last dish and dried her hands, removed her apron, and reached for her coat. He heard them say tomorrow and g'day and she was out the back door leaving them alone, Hillary and himself and the gooseberry tart which she was bringing to him.

"Have a taste and tell me what you think," she said, putting down the plate and a clean fork, thrusting her hips slightly forward.

Teasing the animals, he thought.

He cut a piece of the tart from the whole with the side of the fork, took up a smear of cream and speared the morsel, brought it to his mouth, leaning over the dish a bit as though protecting his lap against accident, but staring at the dip of her skirt at her crotch. He chewed slowly, as though judging the excellence of the tart, pursing his lips, thrusting out his tongue to lick at them from corner to corner.

"Oh, yes," he said, "any man would give a great deal for a taste of your gooseberry tart."

"When you finish the one you have, you can order some to take along with you," she said.

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Wasn't she clever, he thought, bandying the old innuendo, the old double entendre, back and forth, working the old fool for everything he was worth just for the exercise in it, the test of her allure. Well, he thought, I wonder just how far I can take it, just how far would she be willing to go?

"Have you a minute?" he asked.

"Beg pardon?"

"Well, I notice everyone's gone. It's past teatime and we're quite alone, so no one would be the wiser if you sat down for a moment, would they?"

"I suppose I could sit down if I liked," she said. "I'm the manageress here. But I've still got some cleaning up to do before I close up."

"What cleaning up?"

"Well, your pot and plates. This and that. Wipe the tables. You know."

"I thought you might give me just a moment." He saw her frown a little, obviously wondering where the banter had flown, asking herself why the old fool was becoming so serious and soft-voiced, and if that boded no good. "You see, I've come back to Oxford on a sort of sentimental journey," he went on. "It was here I found my life's love and lost her nearly forty years ago."

He sipped his tea as though surprised and embarrassed at revealing so intimate a secret to a stranger. She sat down. He'd caught her interest and why not, the fiction had worked often enough before through the travels of his middle age, in Brussels and Bath and Vienna and Rome.

It was a lovely, tragic, inventive story he told, with just enough false starts and stops of memory, digressions and elaborations of no particular consequence to anyone except the one who'd lived the experience, to lend an air of authenticity that glibness and perfect progression would never have given it.

There'd been a young student from France, who wore black stockings, pleated skirts, white blouses, berets, and a bat-winged gown of silk. She'd had one brown eye and one blue eye so solemn and innocent and disquieted—but unafraid—that the mere sight of them had always brought sympathetic tears to his eyes. They'd slept together in the bed-sitter he'd rented for the two months. Lying in bed they'd planned her return to Paris when summer came and his traveling with her, to meet her parents and make the plans for marriage. She'd been taken ill a week before their planned depar-

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ture, a congestion of the chest, and she'd been dead within seven days.

He wiped a tear away. It had been one of his finest performances. Hillary reached out to touch his hand.

"Well," he said, with a sharp taking in of breath, indicating a rededication to that old resolve, following the great tragedy, that he must get on with his life—even though it turned out that he'd had to get on with it all alone—and, leaning back and slapping his knees lightly with his palms, he went on to offer his apologies for being so long telling his story and could he help her somehow. "Wipe the tables or wash my dishes. I'm not too old a dog to learn those tricks." The inference being that he'd done such chores for himself so often over the years that they were no trick at all.

"You sit and finish your tea," she said, getting to her feet. "I'll fill the pot with hot if you like."

"That's very kind of you, I've had a sufficiency. But if I could sit here just a moment longer." He laughed with a little catch to it as though there were unshed tears bravely controlled. "I have the terrible feeling that when I walk up those stairs and out the door, there will be no one on the streets. No one in the town. I'll be all alone out there."

"Ah, luv," she murmured and left him to do her closing up chores.

What must it be like outside, he wondered. Was the sun out picking shadows from the students going here and there in the parks and quads, from the citizens on the shopping streets, and casting them across the roadways and the buildings? Was the river turned to molten silver or had the day turned grey as it so often did here in the English midlands as the setting of the sun approached and turned the river and canals into turgid lead.

He'd walked down a flight of steps beside a bridge along Bodley Road on the way to his bed and breakfast the day before and found a path that followed the canal, past some small factory yards, a coal tip, some blocks of flats, a pub announcing itself with a sign painted on its brick flank, and on to a park below a heath, where everything was silent and only three white swans on the water beneath a footbridge gave evidence of life anywhere.

That's when the first great surge of loneliness of a sort he'd never felt before had nearly overcome him. It was the loneliness of age, the realization that there was no more time to mend the fabric of his life, that he'd cast its pattern or had had a pattern imposed upon

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him, and here he was past it, with nowhere to go and no one to go to.

"Well, I'm off," she said, startling him.

He glanced up from his cold tea and saw her standing there, quite another young woman than the one who'd served him.

She still wore her knee-length boots but now she wore a dark-blue leather skirt so much shorter than the concealing cotton skirt she'd worn before that he was suddenly conscious of what could only be called her demanding thighs. A broad red fake-patent-leather belt circled her waist, cinching in that which already was scarcely evident. A white turtleneck jersey that clung to her breasts and belly, a school scarf wound round her neck once, the long end trailing, and a knitted watch cap completed her ensemble.

But that wasn't all. The makeup she'd put on her face was the cause of the most dramatic aspect of her transformation. The lipstick was boldly applied, the lips outlined in a red so dark it was almost maroon and then filled in with cherry. There were artificial blush marks slanting along the tops of her cheekbones and eye liner accenting her eyes heavily, top and bottom.

She looked sluttish and available. It gave him a new confidence.

He stood up and settled the topcoat he'd never removed more carefully on his shoulders, standing taller than he had before, holding one half the skirt back with one hand while searching for his billfold with the other.

"I haven't paid for my cream tea and sweet," he said.

"The tart," she said. "That'll be two pounds twenty."

He handed her three pounds.

"I'll get your change," she said and going to the cash drawer, quickly rang up the last sale of the day and came back with his eighty pence.

He held his hand cupped to receive it, looking at her. She counted the coins out carefully, placing her thumb on the last one she placed in his palm, pressing down a bit, looking right back at him.

"I wonder," he said.

She smiled and said, "I thought you might. I wonder what you wonder."

"I wonder if I might be bold on such short acquaintance."

"You want to take me out?"

"I thought a meal."

"You've just had a meal."

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"I mean I'd like to buy you supper. Take you to the cinema or the theater."

"Make a night of it?" she said, insinuatingly.

"If you like. We can do anything you've a mind to do. I'm simply in great need of company and don't have a clue what I can do about it."

"Except ask strange girls for dates."

He smiled disarmingly, trying to look old but not decrepit, worldly-wise and interesting, the kind of man who could show a girl a fascinating time for an evening, no matter the difference in their ages.

"That's just it. I don't feel we're strangers. Perhaps it was the good advice you gave me about the tart."

She cocked her head a bit. Vivien Leigh in "Waterloo Bridge." He wondered if she'd ever seen the film in some rerun house or on the television. She had the same gamine quality of the amateur whore that Vivien had managed to convey.

He thrust the eighty pence at her. "Look here. That was unforgivable of me, telling you my sad story and then asking you to share an evening with me."

She didn't put out her hand for the money. "Well, I don't know about that," she said. "Give me some time to think about it."

"What shall I do while you think about it?"

"You can walk me home. It's only about a mile along the Bodley Road."

"I'm living just off the road myself."

"How far along?"

"The owner of the bed and breakfast said two miles. I walked it yesterday and the day before and it seemed about right."

"I live about a mile along, just down the road from the little wooden church. Do you remember passing it?"

He nodded, grinning. "Would you say our meeting was fated?"

"Here, here," she said, as though warning him not to read too much into the accident of their meeting. "There's thousands live along Bodley Road and hundreds of them stop in here for tea."

"Well, if you won't believe in destiny and miracles," he said, taking her arm as though they were old friends, "please allow me to do so."

They left through the back door, she locking it behind her, both in very high spirits, gaining the high street and walking over to

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Bodley Road, she tucking her arm in his now, matching her stride to his.

He remembered vaguely seeing the wooden church. If he was correct, it stood not more than a hundred yards back from the path beside the canal on the side he'd not walked before.

The air was becoming just crisp enough as the sun slipped down the sky to cloud the breath and exhilarate his spirit. It was a fine day for doing what they were doing, for what they were, he hoped, about to do.

At the bridge over the canal he said, "There's the church, right there, isn't it?"

"My digs are just back of it a quarter mile or so along the side road."

"Could we come up on the back side of it from the path along the canal or is there much else intervening?"

"I was just going to say. I often go that way," she said, and without saying more, as if in perfect agreement without the need for speech, they turned off the sidewalk and went down the stairs leading to the canal and path.

The quarter mile along the canal was unattractive. The junkyards of the city were gathered there. But then there was a narrow empty plot and, stopping there, she pointed up the slightly sloping wasteland to a small block of flats set well back from the scarcely moving stream.

"I tell everyone I live in the country," she said.

"Does it get better further on?" he asked.

"How do you mean better?"

"Quieter. More tranquil."

"More desolate?" she asked, the word somehow sounding strange coming from her mouth, as though she'd already guessed the purpose that was only then growing in him.

"More peaceful," he said. "The whole city of Oxford seemed peaceful forty years ago. But that seems past."

"So, it's peace you want," she said. She clasped her hands in the crook of his arm and hugged it to her. "If you're in the mood for a walk, I'll show you quiet places you'd think were picture postcards."

It took a long time getting there. They passed a solitary fisherman and were once overtaken by a man with a briefcase.

He tired but neither faltered nor complained.

She informed him that she'd decided to spend the evening with him. So they talked about which restaurant, which club or cabaret they should try.

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At last she said, "We'd better be starting back or we'll be caught out in the dark."

Dusk was falling, turning a tranquil setting even more tranquil. There were swans—the same swans or other swans—in a wide spot overhung with willows. There was a broad heath with a bench at the verge up a short rise beneath a copse of trees. When he begged a moment's rest, they climbed the little hill. At the top there was another footpath crossing the heath toward a distant suburb of the town and another running down the center parallel to their view. A jogger trotted along perhaps two hundred yards away and at the very end, no more than toy figures, someone pushed a baby in a pram.

He sat down with a grateful sigh and rueful smile, making much of his age again, angry with her because she didn't sit down at once but stood looking all around.

"I'm not used to walking so much at home," he said.

"Home?" she said, finally sitting down beside him.

"New York," he said.

"It's a dream of mine, visiting New York."

"It's become a hateful place," he said.

"Well, there are opportunities there. A lot to do. Excitement. Challenges."

"Hard to make a living in the big cities," he said.

She cut her eyes at him; a sluttish glance. "Oh, I'd have no trouble. I'd find a way."

"It's more expensive than you think," he said, hating her youthful optimism and self-assurance.

"Well, then, I'd find someone to pay my bills for me, wouldn't I?"

His heart began to beat faster. She was suggesting things to him. She was saying that she would find a man to keep her. An older man like himself?

"Your family wouldn't like it if you went so far away."

"I've got no family here. My mum and dad live up in Birmingham, don't you know. They said good riddance to bad rubbish when I left home to go to London and if they heard I was going so far away as New York they'd be happier still. Less chance of my body being delivered on their doorstep for burial."

There it was again. A remark that seemed meant to tease him with the thought that she knew the rage in him, knew what means he had to use to put the demons to rest.

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His eyes were on her mouth—her red, writhing mouth—as she spoke. He dropped his eyes a fraction. She'd placed a beauty mark just there above her chin, a whore's advertisement.

"Well, your friends would miss you," he said.

"Not likely. I share a flat with two of the girls in the shop. I see enough of them all day. I can't wait to get away from that at night."

"Is that why you decided to accept my invitation?"

"Now, don't get touchy. What difference does it make. It's just that you want the company of a girl, isn't it?"

"Everyone would rather spend an evening with someone than alone."

"But you wanted a young woman—a girl—to laugh and joke with. Maybe have a little cuddle? I mean you wouldn't be so anxious to spend the evening with another man like yourself, a traveler on his own. The pubs and tea shops are full of them. Or some old biddy who'd be glad of the chance to have a meal and a chat and perhaps even a little slap and tickle," she said with a certain aggression in her manner.

"You're getting a little bold, here, aren't you?"

"I don't mean to be insulting. I'd just like to put it on the table with the teapot and the scones, so to speak. You're a man who's come back to a place where you'd had some lovely adventures when you were young and it's not at all like you remembered it."

His eyes fell another fraction or two. He could still see her mouth moving like some scarlet sea creature, a little tongue flicking out now and then, but his vision was centered on the hollow of her throat.

"The young women look right through you, don't they? Oh, I've heard it all before. Do you think you're the only one to discover he's grown old? That's the way it is. It comes to every one of us."

He wanted to shut her up. He didn't want to know.

"You should've seen my mum when she was my age," she went on. "I've seen photos. She was even prettier than me. You should see her now. So, my eyes are wide open. I know I'll grow old one day and look much like she does now. So, what's the answer? To live life while you can. Oh, oh, don't look like that. Are you going to cry? I'm not trying to hurt your feelings. I'm trying to tell you I understand and I can make it better for you. It'll cost you. Everything has a price, doesn't it? But, I promise you a square deal, value for money."

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"What are you talking about?" he murmured, the blood running as heavily as a freezing river in his ears.

"I mean you've got a wad of money and I've got youth. It's quiet here, just like you wanted. Go on up to the heath if you want and have a look around. It's grown too dark for joggers or mums wheeling their prams across the paths. We're all alone here. We don't have to bother with a restaurant or a movie house or a cabaret. I can give you what you really want right here, right now."

She opened her coat. She reached out for his hands and placed them on her hard breasts outside her jumper.

He was about to raise his hands to her throat, to place the thumbs just so, but she drew him closer and he gave way, hoping that there might be magic in the moment and that her kiss would unburden him of the years.

She placed her red mouth on his. He seemed to feel her lips curved up into a knowing smile. He felt her tongue like a bit of fire.

He didn't see or feel her reach down into her boot with her right hand. He never noticed the thin blade, no thicker than an old-fashioned hatpin, poised at his neck between scarf and jaw. He was about to break the kiss—her mouth offensive all at once, tasting of grease—and raise his hands to her throat. He was about to punish her for being young and understanding him so well. And while he thought the thoughts required to complete those simple acts, still held in thrall by her young mouth, greasy taste and all, he felt an icy sensation below his ear, a point of pain that was not quite a pain, and then a savage agony spread into a blackness into which he fell.

Hillary gave way slowly, sliding back along the bench until the man was bent in the middle, his legs tilted a little at a slant, his head and torso on the bench, cheek against the slats, his hat falling off and rolling away along the ground.

She went quickly through his pockets, putting his wallet filled with credit cards, money clip, and small change into her own pockets. She arranged the scarf so that the puncture wound and slight trickle of blood was concealed.

He looked like some old gentleman who'd been strolling along the canal and, sitting down to rest for a moment to enjoy the peace and quiet and appreciate the swans, was suddenly taken with a heart attack and had died peacefully there in the twilight.

"There, luv," she said, "just as I promised. You'll never grow a day older."●

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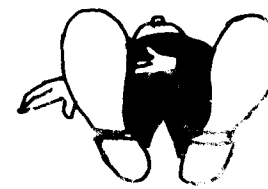

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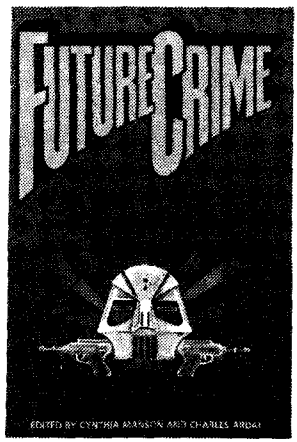

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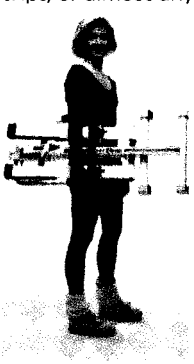

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